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# mindfields

THE JOURNAL ABOUT IDEAS AND LEARNING

Fall 2008 Rs 50

## MARIA MONTESSORI

Renaissance woman and her visionary philosophy

## NAMMA SHAALE

A child-centric universe

## HANDS-ON MUSEUMS

One for each school!

## CHILDREN'S PUBLISHING

Tulika Books

## MULTI-AGE CLASSROOMS

How they work

## 'L' IS FOR LETTING BE

Everybody needs free time

## HISTORY ON THE STREETS

Bangalore Walks





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**Editorial** [editor@mindfields.in](mailto:editor@mindfields.in)

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## Printed and Published by

LUKE HAOKIP

for iDiscoveri Education Pvt Ltd

Near Sector 57, Sushant Lok III

Gurgaon 122003, Delhi NCR

T 91 124 2855 000 F 91 124 2855 001



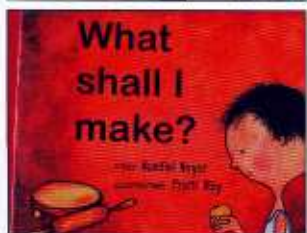
Printed at Pragati Offset Pvt. Ltd,

17 Red Hills, Hyderabad 500 004

[www.pragati.com](http://www.pragati.com)

Fall 2008



**WORLDLY WISE****Maria Montessori***Her ideas are now 'common sense' to progressive educators the world over***Page 06****EDUCATOR****Rama Reddy of Namma Shaale***A Bangalore school imparts Montessori-based education all the way through to Grade 12.***Page 14****INSIGHT****Multi-Age Learning***Environments that understand that children learn at different paces***Page 20****GET ACQUAINTED WITH HISTORY****Hands On Museums***An audacious, dynamic idea to put life into history, and a museum into every school***Page 24****BRINGING LEARNING HOME****Books to Delight In***Radhika Menon of Tulika Books is a pioneer in children's publishing***Page 28****INTERACTIONS****History in the Streets***Bangalore Walks recreates history using engrossing storytelling techniques***Page 34****OUTREACH****Of Play and Peace***Using gaming techniques to resolve communal tension***Page 42****SUBSCRIPTION** Page 03**MAILBOX** Page 05**FIRST PERSON** Page 38  
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# EDITORS' NOTE



This issue brings you the extraordinarily humane vision and philosophy of Maria Montessori; and a story about Namma Shaale, a school that carries the rewarding but energy-intensive Montessori method all the way through Grade 12.

We laud the spirit and enterprise of two young women who aspire to give Indian history a child-friendly and exciting makeover - Dakshayini Gowda with her hands-on museums, and Roopa Pai with her historical walks.

Gouri Dange talks about the importance of having your child do absolutely *nothing* now and then, Ashish Rajpal shares the heartwarming aftermath of prickly conversations with his nine-year old, and Tulika Books' Radhika Menon talks about the future of children's book publishing.

This content list hopes to firmly place children where they truly belong - at the centre of the universe!

Amruta Patil

Luke Haokip



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# The Heritage School

GURGAON



I have never let my schooling interfere with my education  
*Mark Twain*

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# MAILBOX

## FROM A SCHOOL OWNER

Being associated with iDiscoveri for over 3 years, I am pleased with the 'Mindfields' initiative. Being a school owner I can see the kind of effect your journal can have on school owners, educators and others who are concerned with education.

Harsh Madhok  
Executive Director  
Sunbeam Group of Schools  
and Colleges, Varanasi

## LESSONS FROM AMAR CHITRA KATHA

The content of the magazine is informative. As a librarian I was Impressed by the article 'Not Just Telling Stories' by Lalitha Visweswaran. It gave me many ideas to improve the reading skills of children using Amar Chitra Kathas. Thank you very much for publishing such a magazine in India.

Vasumathi Jayaraman  
Ashok Leyland School,  
Hosur, Karnataka

## AN IDEA WHOSE TIME HAS COME

Have read a couple of issues of Mindfields. Liked the contents very much. In fact, after 18 years of corporate life and 'retiring' as VP (Sales and Marketing) of a US-based company, I have now formed my own company to allow my passions - education and corporate training - to blossom. This is an idea whose time has come (for me). I would like to be Mindfields contributor.

Jones Mathew  
By email

## REORIENTING OUR VIEW

Especially after TZP (Taare Zameen Par), I think everybody is interested in the subject of alternative education. And this magazine, Mindfields, is awesome.

It's interesting to see young authors from different walks of life write in it on various aspects of life that are directly related to us as brothers, sisters, uncles, aunties or even future parents. It's a total reorientation about how we are used to looking at education, knowledge and life.

Tshering Chonzom,  
Phd Candidate,  
Centre for East Asian Studies,  
Jawaharlal Nehru University,  
New Delhi

## PREACHING TO THE CHOIR?

Enjoyed both the issues of Mindfields. As with all such endeavours, I just wonder (I hope I'm wrong, though) whether one lands up preaching to the converted.

I'm thinking of the accountant who asked me the other day if I didn't want to take my son out of the school he was in because without exams he wouldn't be able to do well later in life. I'm thinking of the parents of children in this school who sent their kids for tuitions, abacus classes, tennis, painting, cursive writing, drama, pottery, gymnastics, as if a child without organised time is a neglected one. How does Mindfields address these people?

And I did already tell you, didn't I, that we loved the scientist-toymaker Arvind Gupta?

S. Swami  
Hyderabad

DO YOU HAVE CRITIQUE TO OFFER US? OR A STORY IDEA OR EXPERIENCE YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE? WE'D LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU. MAIL US AT: EDITOR@MINDFIELDS.IN  
SELECTED LETTERS WILL BE PUBLISHED IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF MINDFIELDS.







# The child-centred universe of Maria Montessori

She was a renaissance woman in the truest sense of the word. It is a mark of Maria Montessori's vision that her ideas - once deemed radical and perplexing - have come to signify 'common sense' to progressive educators the world over.

TEXT: MINDFIELDS TEAM  
PHOTOS: MINDFIELDS TEAM, NAMMA SHALLE

The term 'Montessori' makes its appearance on sundry playschool signboards across urban and small-town India. Most of the places run on a loose approximation of the Montessori Method. The woman who lends her name to the method is largely unknown outside the circle of educators.

There are many reasons why Alessandro Montessori and Renilde Stoppani's daughter Maria Montessori (31<sup>st</sup> August 1870 - 6<sup>th</sup> May 1952) counts as a renaissance woman. Born in Chiaravalle, Italy, the irrepressibly free-spirited Montessori grew up dreaming of becoming a physician when most little girls around her wanted to be teachers or nuns. Many a societal feather was ruffled by her decision

to join medical school - she was not permitted to work with cadavers in mixed company - but Montessori went on to become the first Italian woman to receive a Doctorate in Medicine. A deeply spiritual person who was also a meticulous scientific mind - Montessori was a vocal feminist long before it became a fashionable thing to be.

What Montessori remains best known for, though, is her philosophy about how children learn through meaningful experience. Montessori's work in the realm of education started with children with development disabilities at the Orthophrenic School of Rome. She was intrigued with the idea of 'educating the uneducable', and methodically studied her disabled students (labeled "idiots" or



"mentally defective" by most) to evolve ways to develop independence and academic understanding. The unique environment and experiences she created brought about a sea change in the lives of these children – Montessori's great success earned her national recognition. She was convinced that the principles used to work with children with development disabilities would work wonders with all children.

Montessori found the rigidity of schools – with their rows of straight-backed benches, subservient children, and autocratic teachers – oppressive and detrimental to learning. Her own ideas on education sprang from a combination of scientific training, intensive and long-continued study of educational problems, empathy and intuition and a broad social outlook.

For someone whose method relies so heavily on observation and documentation, Montessori was the first to admit that cold scientific ideas would achieve naught unless

tempered by humanitarianism. Learning called for the kind of relationship and love between a teacher and child, that simply could not exist between a student of zoology and his specimens. A good teacher, Montessori felt, must be characterized by a deep connection with, and love for human beings, and the natural world. "I liken the effects of these (early) lessons to the impressions of one who walks quietly, happily, through a wood, alone, and thoughtful, letting his inner life unfold freely," she noted.

At the heart of Montessori's ideology, lies the observation of children's needs. Rather than 'teaching' concepts, an environment is designed to stimulate the child's interest and facilitate his understanding and learning capacities spontaneously.

"In my methods, the teacher teaches little and observes much," wrote Montessori, "...above all, it is her function to direct the psychic activity of the children and their physiological development."



The Government of Italy has issued a 1000 Lire banknote in Montessori's honour

It is a mark of Montessori's vision that ideas like "Follow the Child", once deemed radical and perplexing, have come to signify 'common sense' to progressive educators the world over.

Maria Montessori wrote prolifically, and documented her experiences throughout her life. Her books are still essential reading for people interested in understanding and educating children. The writing is clear and wise – replete with observations, insights, anecdotes and parables.

Almost hundred and forty years after her birth, Maria Montessori's ideas are the foundation of an educational movement that has taken root worldwide. ■

## Montessori in India

An Indian teacher was sent by the erstwhile state of Mysore to attend Montessori's first international course in 1913. By late 1930s, Montessori's educational methods had started taking root in India. Maria Montessori was invited to India by George Arundale (then president of the Theosophical Society of India) and his wife, the maverick danseuse Rukmini Devi. Montessori accepted the invitation. In 1940, at the age of seventy, she journeyed to India with her son Mario, and made Adyar her home for almost a decade.

Within months of their arrival, WWII started in Europe. As Italian citizens, Maria and her son were in enemy



Maria Montessori and her son Mario

territory in British India – and this even resulted in a brief imprisonment for Mario. Mother and son spent the duration of war in India, traveling all over. In India, Montessori found a willing learning partner for her ideas and pedagogy – unlike the skepticism that it met.

She returned to Holland in 1946, and was to visit India one last time in 1949. After Montessori's departure, schools that had been started in forties began to lose their way amidst the social and political turbulence of early independence.





## Excerpts from Maria Montessori's Writing

Her philosophy and approach remains remarkably fresh and in tune with modern minds.

### ON CLASSROOM FURNISHING

The novelty lies in my idea for the use of open-air space which is to be in direct communication with the schoolroom, so that the children may be free to go and come as they like, throughout the entire day. (One) modification in the matter of school furnishings is the abolition of desks, and benches or stationary chairs.

I have had tables made with wide, solid, octagonal legs, spreading in such a way that the tables are at the same time solidly firm and very light, so light, indeed, that two four-year-old children can easily carry them about. These tables are rectangular

and sufficiently large to accommodate two children along the long side, there being room for three if they sit rather close together. There are smaller tables at which one child can work alone.

I also designed and manufactured little chairs. My first plan for these was to have them cane seated, but experience has shown the wear on these to be so great, that I now have chairs made entirely of wood. These are very light and of an attractive shape.

In addition to these, I have in each schoolroom a number of comfortable little armchairs, some of wood and some of wicker. Another piece of our school furniture consists of a little

**PLAINLY, THE ENVIRONMENT MUST BE A LIVING ONE, DIRECTED BY A HIGHER INTELLIGENCE, ARRANGED BY AN ADULT WHO IS PREPARED FOR (HER) MISSION.**





washstand, so low that it can be used by even a three-year-old child...

In each of our schoolrooms we have provided a series of long low cupboards, especially designed for the reception of the didactic materials. The doors of these cupboards open easily, and the care of the materials is confided to the children. The tops of these cases furnish room for potted plants, small aquariums, or for the various toys with which the children are allowed to play freely. We have ample blackboard space, and these boards are so hung as to be easily used by the smallest child..

Above the blackboards are hung attractive pictures, chosen carefully, representing scenes in which children would naturally be interested...

#### ON PRIZES AND PUNISHMENT

Prizes and punishments are...the instrument of slavery for the spirit.

The prize and the punishment are incentives toward unnatural or forced effort...The jockey offers a piece of sugar to his horse before jumping into the saddle, the coachman beats his horse that he may respond to the signs given by the reins; and, yet, neither of these runs so superbly as the free horse of the plains. And here, in the case of education, shall man place the yoke upon man?

#### ON UNRULY CHILDREN

The child, like every strong creature fighting for the right to live, rebels against whatever offends that occult impulse within him which is the voice of nature, and which he ought to obey; and he shows by violent actions, by screaming and weeping that he has been overborne and forced away from his mission in life.

He shows himself to be a rebel, a revolutionist, an iconoclast, against those who do not understand him

and who, fancying that they are helping him, are really pushing him backward in the highway of life. Thus even the adult who loves him, rivets about his neck another calumny, confusing his defence of his molested life with a form of



**WE CANNOT KNOW THE CONSEQUENCE OF SUPPRESSING A CHILD'S SPONTANEITY WHEN HE IS JUST BEGINNING TO BE ACTIVE. WE MAY SUFFOCATE LIFE ITSELF.**





DIDACTIC MATERIAL MAKES IT EASY TO FACILITATE LEARNING, RATHER THAN TO "TEACH" CONCEPTS

innate naughtiness characteristic of little children.

The child who throws himself on the writing-pad, the cover to the ink-well, and such objects, always struggling in vain to attain his desire, always hindered and thwarted by people stronger than he, always excited and weeping over the failure of his desperate efforts, is wasting nervous force. His parents are mistaken if they think that such a child ever gets any real rest, just as they are mistaken when they call "naughty" the little man longing for the foundations of his intellectual edifice.

The children in our schools are the ones who are really at rest, ardently and blessedly free to take out and put back in their right places or grooves, the geometric figures offered to their instinct for higher self-development; and they, rejoicing in the most entire spiritual calm, have no notion that their eyes and hands are initiating them into the mysteries of a new language.

The majority of our children become calm as they go through such exercises, because their nervous system is at rest. Then we say that such children are quiet and good; external discipline, so eagerly sought after in ordinary schools is more than achieved.

#### ON OBEDIENCE

Often (and this is another misconception) we think all we need to do, to obtain a voluntary action from a child, is to order him to do it. We pretend that this phenomenon of a forced voluntary action exists, and we call this pretext, "the obedience of the child."

There springs up as a consequence of this, childish timidity, which is a moral malady acquired by a will which could not develop...

The children in our schools are never timid. One of their most fascinating qualities is the frankness with which they treat people, with

which they go on working in the presence of others, and showing their work frankly...

That moral monstrosity, a repressed and timid child, who is at his ease nowhere except alone with his



THE CHILDREN IN OUR SCHOOLS ARE NEVER TIMID. ONE OF THEIR MOST FASCINATING QUALITIES IS THE FRANKNESS WITH WHICH THEY TREAT PEOPLE...





BEING IN TUNE WITH THE NATURAL WORLD IS AN ESSENTIAL ASPECT OF THE MONTESSORI METHOD

playmates, because his will-power was allowed to grow only in the shade, disappears in our schools.

#### ON DISCIPLINE

The first objection which will present itself to the minds of persons accustomed to the old-time methods of discipline;—the children in these schools, moving about, will overturn the little tables and chairs, producing noise and disorder; but this is a prejudice which has long existed in the minds of those dealing with little children, and for which there is no real foundation...

Discipline must come through liberty. It is a (difficult) principle for the followers of common-school methods to understand. How shall one obtain discipline in a class of free children?

...In our system, we have a concept of discipline very different from that commonly accepted. If discipline is founded upon liberty, the discipline itself must necessarily be active. We do not

consider an individual disciplined only when he has been rendered as artificially silent as a mute and as immovable as a paralytic. He is an individual annihilated, not disciplined...

The task of the educator lies in seeing that the child does not confound good with immobility and evil with activity, as often

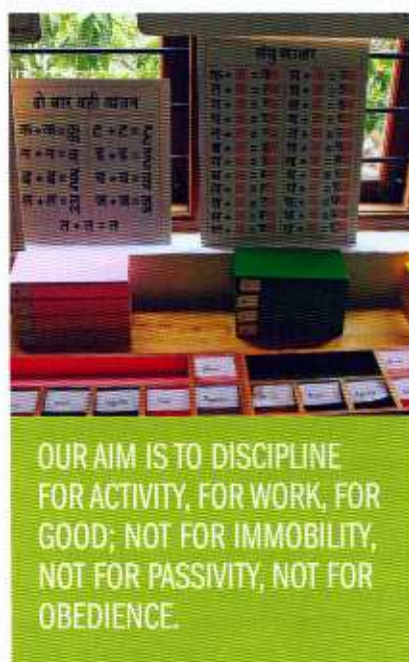
happens in the case of the old-time discipline. Our aim is to discipline for activity, for work, for good; not for immobility, not for passivity, not for obedience. A room in which all the children move about usefully, intelligently, and voluntarily, without committing any rough or rude act, would seem to me a classroom very well disciplined indeed.

We cannot know the consequences of suffocating...spontaneous action at the time when the child is just beginning to be active: perhaps we suffocate life itself.

#### ON THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER

The lessons are individual, and brevity must be one of their chief characteristics. Dante gives excellent advice to teachers when he says, "Let thy words be counted." The more carefully we cut away useless words, the more perfect will become the lesson.

Another characteristic quality of the lesson...is its simplicity. It must be stripped of all that is not



OUR AIM IS TO DISCIPLINE  
FOR ACTIVITY, FOR WORK, FOR  
GOOD; NOT FOR IMMOBILITY,  
NOT FOR PASSIVITY, NOT FOR  
OBEDIENCE.





### FEATURES OF THE MONTESSORI METHOD:

Children are seen as competent beings, encouraged to make decisions

Curriculum Development is based on observation the child in a prepared environment

Creation of a carefully-planned, child-sized physical environment (with child-sized furniture etc) to produce a self-running children's microcosm

Emphasis on the 'absorbent mind' - the limitless motivation of the young child to achieve competence over his or her environment and to perfect his or her skills and understandings as they occur within each sensitive period.

The role of self-correcting 'auto-didactic' material

absolute truth. That the teacher must not lose herself in vain words, is included in the first quality of conciseness; this second, then, is closely related to the first: that is, the carefully chosen words must be the most simple it is possible to find, and must refer to the truth. The third quality of the lesson is its objectivity...

In the giving of such lessons the fundamental guide must be the method of observation, in which is included and understood the liberty

of the child. So the teacher shall observe whether the child interests himself in the object, how he is interested in it, for how long, etc., even noticing the expression of his face. And she must take great care not to offend the principles of liberty. For, if she provokes the child to make an unnatural effort, she will no longer know what is the spontaneous activity of the child...

...To measure one's own activity, to make it conform to these standards of clearness, brevity and truth, is practically a very difficult matter.

#### ON NATURE AND LEARNING

When the children put a seed into the ground, and wait until it fructifies, and see the first

**THE LESSON MUST BE PRESENTED IN SUCH A WAY THAT THE PERSONALITY OF THE TEACHER SHALL DISAPPEAR. THERE SHALL REMAIN ... ONLY THE OBJECT TO WHICH SHE WISHES TO CALL THE ATTENTION OF THE CHILD.**

appearance of the shapeless plant, and wait for the growth and the transformations into flower and fruit, and see how some plants sprout sooner and some later, and how the deciduous plants have a rapid life, and the fruit trees a slower growth, they end by acquiring a peaceful equilibrium of conscience, and absorb the first germs of that wisdom which so characterised the tillers of the soil in the time when they still kept their primitive simplicity.

...The difference between the products of nature and those of industry, between divine products

and human products—it is this that must be born spontaneously in the child's conscience...The child follows the natural way of development of the human race. In short, such education makes the evolution of the individual harmonise with that of humanity. The action of educative nature so understood is very practically accessible...It will always be possible to find a few square yards of land that may be cultivated, or a little place where pigeons can make their nest, things sufficient for spiritual education. Even a pot of flowers at the window can... fulfil the purpose.

#### ON INDEPENDENCE

We habitually serve children; and this is not only an act of servility toward them, but it is dangerous, since it tends to suffocate their useful, spontaneous activity...The mother who feeds her child without making the least effort to teach him to hold the spoon for himself and to try to find his mouth with it...offends the fundamental human dignity of her son...she treats him as if he were a doll, when he is, instead, a (person) confided by nature to her care.

Who does not know that to teach a child to feed himself, to wash and dress himself, is a much more tedious and difficult work, calling for infinitely greater patience, than feeding, washing and dressing the child one's self?

...Not only is it easier for the mother, but it is very dangerous for the child, since it closes the way and puts obstacles in the path of the life which is developing... We must make of the future generation, powerful men, and by that we mean men who are independent and free. ■





Rama Reddy, the founder and principal of Namma Shaale



# THIS IS NAMMA SHAALE

Namma Shaale (the name means 'our school' in Kannada) is a Bangalore-based school, unique in imparting Montessori-based education all the way through Grade 12. We visited the beautiful precincts of the school and spoke to Rama Reddy, the unassuming force behind this twelve-year-old effort.

TEXT: AS TOLD TO AMRUTA PATIL  
ADDITIONAL PHOTOS: NAMMA SHAALE

## WHAT WERE YOUR EARLY YEARS LIKE?

I lost my father when I was eight years old. I was sent to Vidyodaya, a residential school in Chennai – from 3rd grade to 9th grade. Until that time, I had lived in a small town, and spoke no English. I didn't like studies – I did really badly in academics. In retrospect, the boarding school years were very valuable in terms of exposure, I got to interact with students from different countries, and from different parts of India. But school was really overwhelming for me – everything about it. Then my mother, my three sisters and I moved to Hyderabad and set up base there.





Learning environments are marked by open space, natural light and beautiful flooring

#### HOW DID YOU DECIDE TO START A SCHOOL?

I have a background in home science and child development from Hyderabad College of Home science. The decision to start a school came about late - and was motivated in part by the fact that my sons were in a school that followed the Montessori ideology. I liked what I saw, and decided to undergo Montessori training. A friend of mind said, "Why don't *we* run a school?" and I thought, "Why not?". Some years down the line, my friend opted out, and I took the project forward.

We have an informal trust that runs Namma Shaale - individuals cannot run a school. I do most of the work and the family is involved in some way or the other. My father-in-law helped out with construction and gardening, my mother teaches embroidery on Monday and Tuesdays.

This (*gestures towards the green surroundings*) used be agricultural land first - where jowar and other dry crops were grown. But the water table was bad, and people gave up. When we took over, there wasn't a single tree here. All these trees have been planted by us.

My husband (Malla Reddy, a mechanical engineer) and I designed the buildings. I'm sure an architect can make a long list of everything we have done wrong, (*Laughs*) but we didn't want to rely on an architect. I spend a lot of time with children, and get all my directions from there. So when we were planning

**WHEN WE WERE PLANNING THE SPACE, I INSTINCTIVELY KNEW WHAT NEEDED TO BE DONE.**

the space, I instinctively knew what was needed to be done. There was a simple clarity to it all.

#### TELL US ABOUT THE WORKINGS OF THE SCHOOL...

Namma Shaale is self-sustained - and have been for the last 3 years - for the running cost at least. The fee works out to about Rs. 1500 a month. Some children don't pay anything at all, some pay a smaller amount. Whatever sum a parent can afford to pay, we put it down on paper, and stick to it.

All the teachers here are Montessori trained. We are a team - but we are an accountable team. We can walk in and walk out of any each others' class - that is totally welcome. If something is not working out other teachers help out. Parents come in and contribute - one parent teaches





Erdikindar, or 'land-children', at Mamma Shoolu

yoga to the elementary every morning.

Initially, the school ran without the concept of 'school principal'. "We have decided to walk this path together," we thought, "there is no need for hierarchy. But it didn't work out so well. We realised that each of us was walking on a path, but they were all individual paths that had nothing to do with each other. It became important to break these individualistic walls. Otherwise too much time is spent deliberating things, going to and fro, getting into ego tussles, fighting. We aren't a residential

school – all we get is from 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 pm – there are too few hours to waste! After all, school is not about you and me. It's all about the child.

We have a very systematic, efficient record keeping system here, and a small troupe of about eighty kids. Children need to go through the entire Montessori curriculum, right from the beginning. Which means that we do not admit kids in the middle of their school years. They join the school at the age of two and a half, and continue. Some kids have

#### HOW THE METHOD TRANSLATE INTO CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE?

To a lay person, the Montessori method can come across as very theoretical and prop-intensive. Maria Montessori was a doctor by training, and her methods are very clinical and observation-based. And all 'techniques' are derived from these scientific observations made by various people and Montessori herself. At face value, some of the observations can sound quite strange – and you wonder, "Does this *really* happen?" And when it does, it feels

THE LEARNING UNFOLDS SLOWLY, BEAUTIFULLY – YOU CANNOT PREDICT HOW FAST CHILDREN WILL LEARN ABOUT A CONCEPT OR AN IDEA. THERE ARE INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES, IT ISN'T LIKE AN ASSEMBLY LINE.

dropped out along the way, and consequently, older classes have lower numbers than the younger ones.

The ratio here is one adult for twenty five children – some schools have an assistant teacher in every class, but I don't think it is a good idea. The more adults you have in a room, the more they get in the children's way! The medium of instruction here is English for the older children. With the younger ones, we interact in as many languages as the teacher can manage. So you'll hear Kannada being spoken, and Hindi, English, Telugu.

like such a reaffirmation.

So, when you run a shool – you are armed with the theory and your basic understanding, but every day is a fresh start, and you have to make your own way. Maria Montessori thought of the school as a lab where everything had to be carefully set up. To conduct an experiment, you have to get all things in place, or you won't get your readings right. The physical space matters a lot, the teacher's demeanour and expressions matter a lot...the details are very important.



The joy of 'stumbling upon' learning



Child-sized microcosm that replicates the 'real world'



When you know a concept like addition you can apply it to anything in the world - but I realized after some years of observation that a child can practice a million addition sums, but that doesn't guarantee that she will be able to apply the concept of addition to a very small real-life situation.

Two of our students were working on exponents - and happened to discover logarithm tables in the process, without knowing what the term for these number-relationships was. When I told them that they were called logarithm tables, the children said, "Wow. Somebody has actually done this before. Why didn't you tell us if you knew that!" Their fundamentals are right, they have arrived at formulas all by themselves. It is lovely to see the children bump into that kind of self-discovered understanding.

You can see the same thing happen with language. We don't force reading and writing - it is supposed to be a naturally occurring process. In Montessori language it is called "explosion into writing". One day you will see the child write, read - so you wait for an explosion to happen. It typically happens at four-and-half years for writing, and at about five for reading.

The learning unfolds slowly, beautifully - but you cannot really predict

how fast they may learn or come to that understanding about a concept or an idea. There are individual differences, it isn't like an assembly line. For some child it may happen earlier, for others, a year or two later. But there is a cut off point. If it doesn't happen, we verbalize a little bit more with material.

DO YOU NEED TO IMPROVISE ON EXISTING DIDACTIC MATERIAL?

The child, the adult, and the prepared environment form a necessary triangle in the Montessori method. The environment consists of scientifically prepared material which is vital to the process.

Until they are twelve years old, children's learning is very material-based. If you are teaching something like 'Area of a Triangle' - Montessori has assigned material for it, which is quite beautiful. I don't think anyone can go back from being at the Montessori environment without feeling "Wow!"

Work with the math material for a while it will give you goose bumps. For someone who was once terrified of Math to go back and say "I can do square roots" - it's a beautiful transition.

There are situations, though, that cannot be addressed with readymade material. Then you need to invent a



way by which you can facilitate the learning, rather than 'teach'. A teacher here felt that six and seven-year-olds learning to write the Devnagri script were getting confused between the *badi ee ki matra* and the *chhoti ee ki matra*.

So we eventually put a box together with cards that had pictures of *badi ee* words and *chhoti ee* words. Then we had the *badi ee* and the *chhoti ee* written out on the box. Children look at each picture and sort it out under either the *badi ee* or the *chhoti ee*. The activity got them discussing sounds, referring to books, making



One of the many green-spaces that classrooms open into



Four of the school





collections of words. A week down the line, they got it!

#### THE 'INDIAN' MONTESSORI

When I went to USA for my training, I realized that ours seems to be a very distinctive 'Indian' Montessori. You have to remember that Maria Montessori lived in India for many years. In fact her elementary method originated in India while she was working with children here. She drew a lot from India – and I feel that the method speaks to us (Indians) more than it speaks to anyone else in the world. It truly makes sense to us at many levels.

All Montessori books are printed and readily available in India, unlike in other countries. Montessori's ideology was passed on to North America much later. In India, we have our own local translations and interpretations – for example – in America when I read out from my text and compared it to the American translation – the Indian version sounded really beautiful. At the end of the session, a teacher there said to me, "Let me hug you so I can get a little bit of the Montessori you have in you."

When they opted to put the children in Namma Shaale, they knew they could pull them out whenever they wanted to. We started the school with the promise that we would follow the Montessori method. We didn't know till what grade the school would continue. There were no high expectations and there was implicit faith.

As the school grew, the parents could see the wonderful progress their children were making, and chose to stay on with us. It doesn't take an edu-

**ONE OF THE REASONS WE BUILT TILED ROOFS ON OUR BUILDINGS WAS TO ENSURE WE WOULD NEVER BUILD UPSTAIRS AND START SECTION A, B, C, D! YOU CANNOT RAISE A SCHOOL IMPERSONALLY!**

INDIAN PARENTS ARE FAMOUSLY EXAM-ORIENTED AND OPT TO GO 'MAINSTREAM' ONCE A CHILD IS DONE WITH KG OR GRADE 3. HOW DID YOU WIN THEIR TRUST?

The childrens' families are all based nearby. These are ordinary people from ordinary homes. They come from all walks of life – ranging from milk suppliers to builders to HAL employees. Most parents are the sort who would have wanted to put their child into a school close to home – if it was an option that worked out economically and logistically.

cated, wealthy home to see that a child is going through fantastic development.

There group is very mixed – socially and financially. It makes us a well-rounded community. Occasionally, a child (of modest means) who sees a classmate with a Transformer toy will go home and ask his parents for one. But there is a two-way exchange, so it sort of evens out.

I am probably a little partial to children of 'just sufficient' homes – I wouldn't say deprived – they aren't hooked to video games, computers,





malls and movies theatres – just curd-rice in their box and there is happiness!

ANY MORE NAMMA SHAALES IN THE OFFING?

One of the reasons we built tiled roofs on our buildings was to ensure we would never build upstairs and start Section A, B, C, D! *(Laughs)*. I find it very difficult to separate my personal life and school – it is a very organic thing. You cannot raise a school impersonally.

We have eighty kids right now, and with the kind of individualized attention they need, eighty feels like a million! As we grow with the children, it will be a full school of hundred and twenty five one day, and we are in no hurry to get there at all! HOW DO YOU CONNECT WITH OTHER EDUCATORS IN INDIA?



### DEVELOPMENTAL PLANES ACCORDING TO MONTESSORI

IN THE MONTESSORI APPROACH, EDUCATION IS SEEN AS AN AID TO LIFE, AND OUGHT TO BEGIN AT THE BIRTH OF A CHILD. MONTESSORI SUGGESTED THAT THERE ARE FOUR DEVELOPMENTAL PLANES, EACH WITH ITS OWN GOALS:

0-6 YEARS - DEVELOPMENT OF THE SELF AS AN INDIVIDUAL BEING

6-12 YEARS - DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOCIAL BEING

12-18 YEARS - BIRTH OF THE ADULT AND FINDING ONE'S SENSE OF SELF

18-24 YEARS - CONSOLIDATING THE MATURE PERSONALITY

Networking does not come to me easily. Some years back, I tried going to every education-related conference and event. It was a desperate reaching out, not wanting to be confined to this small part of the world.

The first time I went to a Wipro in Schools meeting, someone asked me if ours was a progressive school. I thought to myself, "What does this mean? Aren't all schools supposed to be progressive?" Two days into the conference, I found it very difficult to keep pace. Things were so technical – like, discussions about whether a publication should be called a 'magazine' or a 'journal' *(Laughs)*. I am uncomfortable with jargon. When peoples' language gets too technical, I am lost.

This is also the reason why we do not use technical Montessori-speak while interacting with parents. For example 'deviation' is a word Montessori uses very freely but, early on, when I used the term while talking to a parent, she responded very strongly. "You can't call my child deviant!" *(Laughs)*. It's important to speak a language that people understand.

WHAT ARE YOU READING THESE DAYS?

Some time back in the summer holidays we did an anthropological study of a village nearby – then in connection I started reading Karl Marx in connection with an anthropological study we did in a nearby village. I've also enjoyed 'Forest People' by Colin Turnbull and 'Nisa' by Marjorie Shostak. Rachael Carson's 'Under The Sea'. I stopped reading fiction a long time ago.

WHAT DOES RAMA REDDY'S WEEK LOOK LIKE?

I just got back from a holiday with my husband – my sons are too old to want to accompany us anymore. It was nice. But I couldn't wait to get back! On a normal day, I am in school from morning to about



4.30pm, then I go home. I haven't cooked in years. I watch a lot of films on weekend, do a bit of housework, read – three books at once – or working on the computer. But most of the time, thoughts about school – what to do next, what needs to be planned. It's not like a job...the school brings discipline into my life.

At the end of the day, the connection is highly spiritual. There is nothing like going and sitting in the classroom among three year olds, six year olds.

When you are with children you have to be with them fully. There is no way you can think of anything else. You cannot but live for the moment. What can be more special than leaving school at the end of the day – having spent many, many moments of being one with what you are doing. ■

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# MULTI-AGE LEARNING

Learning unfolds at different stages for different children, and chronology has little to do with when a realisation or a skill will manifest itself in a child's life. Here's looking at the challenges and blessings of a multi-age learning environment.





TEXT: SUNANDA MICHELLE  
PHOTOS: YOUNEKA

One of the striking features in a Montessori setting is the multi-age classroom. The primary environment, for example, will have children ranging from ages of three to six – all going through planned activities, and the rituals of social interaction and learning. This is unsettling for everyone who has unquestioningly bought into the philosophy that children of the same age should learn together and that an eight year old is out of place in a room full of ten-year olds. But any parent who has raised children of different ages under one roof, has, in effect, fostered a multi-age learning environment.

The extended family used to be the first multi-age learning environment a child experienced. With older and younger siblings, cousins, and a constellation of adults adding a unique richness to their learning. This is still the experience of rural children who still live in joint family settings, but for the child in the city, things have changed. Increasingly, urban families are nuclear – with two (or one) parents, either (or both)

of who are working; and two children (or one). Children today spend more time outside their homes than their counterparts did even a decade ago. Most of their time is spent in age-segregated settings. Only a handful of 'unconventional' play schools and workshops provide interactions across age groups.

#### GROUPINGS THAT ARISE OUT OF NECESSITY

Where multi-age groupings occur in the Indian system (such as in slum schools or village schools), they are mostly by default – because of an unavailability of resources, budget restraints, or enrollment fluctuations – rather than because of any philosophical preference. Even though the children may sit under the same roof, grade-level distinctions and separate curricula are maintained for each grade – predictably resulting in chaos.

Children frequently lose their motivation to learn, and the drop-out rate of children graduating into middle school is huge. It is important to understand that multi-age





education (of the sort promoted by Montessori) is not the practice of this sort of split-grade education.

#### CONCERNS AND BENEFITS

Ideally in a multi-age setting, each child learns at her own pace. Children who are gifted in specific areas are allowed to move ahead, allowing those who need more time to progress at their own pace without stigma. The focus is on what each child knows, and needs to know - rather than on a body of information that must be disseminated to the entire group, all at once.

Because children remain with the same teachers for a period of two-three years, teachers get to know each child very well, and can help each child attain developmentally-appropriate milestones.

In a multi-age learning environment, teachers can take advantage of the *range* of experiences, knowledge and skills that exist in the group - to

develop programs with open-ended outcomes. The teacher plans for, and expects different outcomes for each child depending on necessary stages of development. Which means that children learn not just from the teacher, but from *each other as well*.

Younger children benefit from the stimulation and example of older children. Older children benefit from serving as role models. Research indicates that aggressive and domineering behavior that often leads to friction between children is not a problem to the extent it might be assumed to be. On the contrary, mixed-age groups often exhibit a strong sense of community.

Older children seem to naturally gravitate towards helping the younger ones, and the process of imparting information and skills improves their own academic performance. They reinforce their own knowledge and skills, which in turn builds their self-confidence and self-esteem, and leads to a stronger understanding of subject matters.



On the social-emotional front, older children often spontaneously comfort and nurture the younger ones, help them read and write, play with them, look after them on the playground, and enable them to accomplish tasks far more complex than if they were in a single-age grouping.

Older children also tend to self-correct their behavior in order to set a 'good example'. That all older students in multi-age groups get a chance to practice being leader helps alleviate the crushing pressure between older children competing for the role of 'boss'. Younger and less able students have their needs met more quickly and more often and because the older children fulfill a nurturing role, there are less behavior problems in the multi-age classrooms.

While multi-age groups can be rewarding, managing them is far from easy. Grade-mindedness of



parents and teachers is a stumbling-block that needs to be continually watched out for.

Common concerns that parents voice include - Will my older child be expected to 'teach' the younger children? Will my younger child be overwhelmed by the older, more competent children and pick up bad behaviour from them? How will the teacher manage to teach all the different age levels?

Like in any other class, the responsibility for the teaching a multi-age group, lies with the teacher. But multi-age environments are more exacting about the demands that they place on teachers. Teachers need to be aware about each child as

an individual. They must assess and evaluate the children's progress more frequently than teachers in a 'regular' school, and in greater detail.

It goes without saying, then, that multi-age classrooms need skillful teachers who can provide and prepare an environment, and develop challenging goals for individual children.

That being said, all environments that cater to teaching and learning must be monitored continuously with the passage of time. They must be modified, tweaked, reviewed and assessed. It takes a dynamic environment to make learning dynamic. ■

### IN A MULTI-AGE CLASS:

- Child's individual and uneven differences in different areas of development are accommodated.
- Older children have an opportunity to take on leadership roles, be role models.
- The element of competition is reduced. In time, this increases co-operation, peer-tutoring and nurturing behaviour.
- Allows more opportunities to set children up for success rather than retention or failure.
- Reflects natural play choices of children and the opportunity to choose and work with children who are not always same-age peers.
- Learning is based on the individual, so no class-levels are evident. Children are not held back or rushed to the next grade.
- Increased interdependence and peer-tutoring encourages better learning, enhances self-esteem.



**SUNANDA MICHELLE**

is a textile designer, curriculum designer, life skills facilitator, consultant for activity-based learning, and preschool teacher with Montessori training from New York. Feels at home in the mountains and has enjoyed experiences of the wilderness since the age of two.







# Hands-on Museums for Schools

Dakshayini Gowda's *Sanchali* is an audacious, dynamic idea that hopes to put life into history, and a museum into every school. A museum with workshops that revive traditional art forms. And no threatening signs that say 'Don't Touch'.

TEXT: MINDFIELDS TEAM  
PHOTOS: DAKSHAYINI GOWDA

Growing up, Dakshayini Gowda wasn't a big one for the school trip to the city museum. She got the gist of the idea, of course – museums were a treasure house of stories, museums were a peep into bygone eras. It didn't help that you had to peep into bygone eras through fogged-over display cases, or across a barricade. Or that the khaki-clad guard's constant refrains were, "Too Close!" and "Don't Touch!"

The thought stayed with her through the years – that it would be

wonderful to have a museum that wasn't dead, a place where have to keep your distance from exhibits that were trying to talk to you! It was the genesis of the idea that would be *Sanchali*.

## THE BIRTH OF SANCHALI

"Our family is originally from a village near Bangalore. Farming has been our family's occupation and still is. My family moved to the city for our education, but we still have a strong connections with the village to our house there. As a child, I loved





going to the village because of the natural setting, and for its simple and loving people, and fascinating crafts. I remember watching my grandmother make little dolls from scraps of cloth, or flowers out of dried seeds. She was never trained but was so creative and skillful," recalls Dakshayini. The affinity with villages and with indigenous crafts was to continue. "I never missed a chance to get onto a train and wander off to faraway places – to explore, see how people live, how they work."

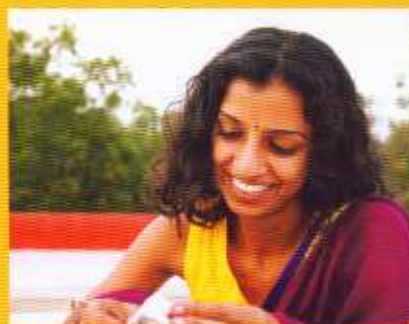
Parental aspirations of having her study dentistry were kept aside when the family realized that Dakshayini's heart lay elsewhere. She enrolled at Chitrakala Parishat and got a Bachelor's degree in sculpture. "As a sculptor, my interest in craft was further strengthened." She went on to spend four years at the renowned MS University, Baroda – and in 2003, completed her Masters degree in Museology and Archaeology.

The latter was to have a profound impact on Dakshayini's course. The archaeology course piqued her interest in the Indus Valley civilization, for one. "Art and craft of a culture can tell you so much about the lifestyle of a people. It

can tell you about their prosperity, their trade and economy – even when no written record of the era exists. The artifacts they made (during the Indus Valley Civilization) even with such limited technology are truly fascinating."

Dakshayini started traveling ardently to villages and excavation sites all over Gujarat – places where some of the oldest artforms had managed to survive across centuries. She talked to people, assimilated the environs, learnt techniques – sculpture, bead making, fabric dyeing.

When her course was over, Daksha found that she no longer had a dilemma about what to do next. "The 'now what?' question was gone. The idea of Sanchali came to me almost immediately – a project that could combine travel, fine art, museology, archaeology, and myriad life experiences. It added up perfectly."



**"(UNLIKE IN A REGULAR MUSEUM) SANCHALI INVITES VIEWERS TO TOUCH AND ENGAGE WITH ART FORMS AND ARTIFACTS."**

**DAKSHAYINI GOWDA**



During the years she spent working as a designer (including stints at the Centre for Vernacular Architecture, Bangalore; and Upasana Design Studio in Auroville) Dakshayini incubated the idea until she was ready with the clarity and confidence required to start the movement.

Sanchali' is the Sanskrit word for 'movement' - A movement that would attempt to revive traditional art forms, and shatter the stuffy image of museum-learning. A lively and interactive format would extend the exhibition's appeal across age groups. "Think of it as a traveling exhibition based on the historic arts and crafts from various periods - starting with the Indus Valley Civilization," says Dakshayini. "There will be craftsmen demonstrating the arts, guest-speakers talking about related themes, guided tours engaging school children and older visitors."

The uniqueness of this exhibition will be its amalgam of workshop-format with a museum-like approach and presentation - period-inspired artifact replicas, tagged with educational write-ups, informative photographs, and eye-pleasing display. "Unlike in a museum, the exhibition will allow viewers to actually touch and engage with the artificial artifacts," shares Dakshayini, with obvious delight. In non-school settings, there will be a 'museum store' selling Dakshayini's recreations of artifacts and souvenirs. Each piece will be accompanied by an informative note discussing its historical significance.

Dakshayini has been training women from Varanasi and Karnataka villages to make hand-crafted jewelry of innovative designs and material - as part of Sanchali's women empowerment project.



THE OBJECTIVE IS TO HAVE THE CHILDREN UNDERSTAND THE RATIONALE BEHIND CHOICE OF MEDIUM, TECHNIQUE, IMAGERY AND SYMBOLOGY USED BY PEOPLE OF THE ERA - AND THEN TRANSLATE IT INTO THEIR OWN WORK.

#### MUSEUM FOR EACH SCHOOL

As with most audacious, enterprising ideas - the journey promises to be an arduous one. Funds were (and are) a constant challenge, and Dakshayini began Sanchali with her meagre savings, and the goodwill of friends and family. Support is beginning to trickle in. "An exhibition at the Canadian International School art week had an encouraging response. Since then, I have had exhibitions with various rural schools nearby," says Dakshayini, adding that she is confident that the idea will catch on with schools.

In planning her sessions, Dakshayini draws inspiration from far and wide - lives of people, travel books, period dramas, and "treasure-hunt kind of movies". But if taken a step to improve learning by lot of interactive programs then it could be made interesting and where students do not have to make an extra effort to remember stuff. History books, books on Indian crafts, travel books. Period inspired movies, treasure hunt kind of movies,

archaeology related programs.

Working with schools, Sanchali hopes to counter the lopsided importance most schools accord to, say, Math or Science. It aims to make History - a subject perceived as boring and stuffy - less top-heavy, less bogged down by dates and names of dead people.

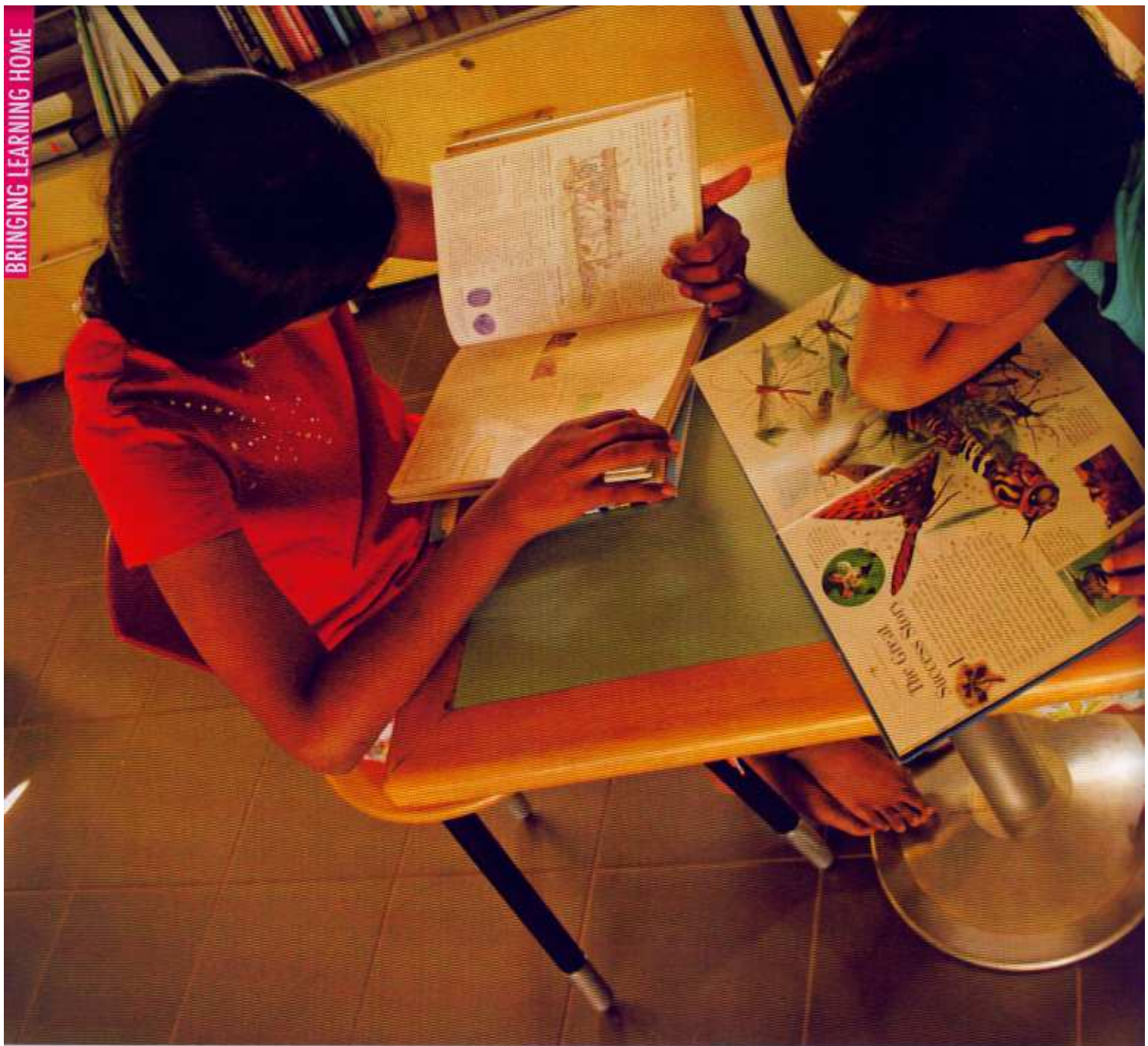
Sanchali hopes to bring about an effortless confluence of history and art. While in the workshops, children are not expected to make carbon copies of existing artifacts. The objective is to have the children *understand* the rationale behind choice of medium, technique, imagery and symbology used by the people of the era - and then translate it into their own work. "So there won't be thirty Dancing Girls and thirty Bearded Man replicas!" laughs Dakshayini.

Once the workshop session is over, the artifacts the kids create can go into creating a museum in the classroom or school gallery. There could be different 'permanent collections' based on different historical eras or cultures. "When learning is inherently interesting," Dakshayini concludes, "children understand and remember things effortlessly." ■



FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT SANCHALI, CONTACT DAKSHAYINI GOWDA; MOBILE NUMBER: +91-9902018521; LANDLINE: +91-80-25457005; E-MAIL: SANCHALI.IN@GMAIL.COM





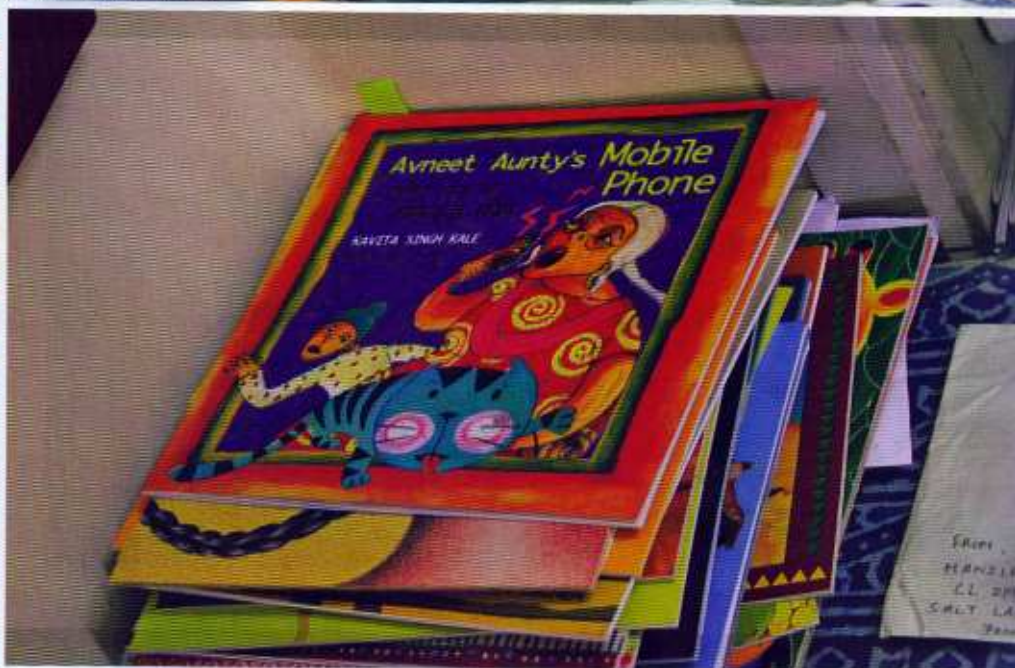
## Books to Delight In

The prevalent mindset in India has been that children's books aren't value for money. If one can buy a management book for Rs 50, the rationale goes, why would one buy a 20-page picture book for the same amount of money? Radhika Menon's Tulika Books, has been a pioneer in the field of original children's publishing in India. Mindfields talks to her about the journey.





Radhika Menon in conversation



## ENTERING THE WORLD OF CHILDREN'S PUBLISHING

After college, I taught at the J. Krishnamurti School (The School KFI) in Chennai from 1978 to 1979. I did my B.Ed while teaching there, so in effect, I went to teach with no background - just my curiosity, and an interest in J.Krishnamurti's philosophy. It was at the school that I got the opportunity to see some really good children's books - mainly

American, British, and Russian books. The lack of Indian children's books of that kind of quality was glaring. It hit me even more when doing a class project on an India-based topic - even something as basic as rivers or mountains of India. Facts were easy to find as our whole approach to teaching is so fact-oriented but where were the stories, songs, poems? There is a culture, a history, a people's lifestyle that is linked to the geography of a place

and that is the kind of understanding that you want children to get from project-based learning. A cross-curricular approach was possible when the topic was, say, the Amazon forests - there were enough books and children could find information themselves. But not if the topic was the river Ganga! (Incidentally Tulika has published four books on the Ganga, Narmada, Brahmaputra and Kaveri rivers in the Read and Colour River Stories





(EARLY ON) WHEN WE SHOWED THE BOOKS TO FRIENDS IN THE PUBLISHING WORLD, THEY WERE MOST DISCOURAGING SAYING THE BOOKS WERE FAR TOO EXPENSIVE BECAUSE THEY WERE SO WELL-PRODUCED! THEY WERE ALSO SKEPTICAL ABOUT THE BILINGUAL CONCEPT. BUT (WE) WERE CONVINCED ABOUT WHAT WE WERE DOING. THERE WAS NO STOPPING US.

series with precisely this kind of approach.)

This realisation that how much good children's books could enhance the creative teaching-learning process is what sparked off my interest in children's books. I certainly wasn't thinking of publishing them but became aware of the wealth of material there was

and the creative possibilities of children's books.

Then came the whole experience of discovering wonderful children's books with my children – reading to them, looking at pictures. Around that time we moved to Delhi and I taught briefly at Sardar Patel Vidyalaya.

There the medium of instruction was Hindi till class 5. I found myself teaching English bilingually and realized how naturally that worked. As my children were in the school too, I was delighted that they were as comfortable in Hindi as they were in English. But there was great resistance when it came to reading books in Hindi which to them seemed so drab visually and very often text-heavy compared to the foreign books in English they read.

While teaching there I was given the responsibility of setting up the primary school library which I did. So my engagement with children's books became deeper. Now I was not thinking of Indian children's books as just in English but that they had to be in the different languages and even be bilingual.

Looking back, the exposure to teaching children in an Indian language and listening to the songs, stories, plays, riddles and rhymes changed the way I thought of children's books in a subtle way. Intrinsic to Indian children's books was an Indian style of telling, visualizing and illustrating. Indian children's books, even in English, had to have an Indian sensibility in the use of language, contexts, visuals, and even in the look and feel, if it had to be rooted in the culture like the best of children's books are. The idea of children's books combining the best of storytelling and art from both from here and the west was very exciting.

#### THE EARLY DAYS OF TULIKA

Around 1990 I left teaching to join hands with my sister-in-law Indira Chandrashekhar and set up a pre-press unit with two Apple Macintoshes which had just come into the market. We started by doing pre-press work for many



publishing houses like Penguin, Sahitya Akademi, Rupa, etc and also turnkey printing work. That was how I discovered the joys of producing printed material from start to finish! And I suppose that was the beginning of my journey into publishing.

We called our unit Tulika Print Communications Services. The name means 'quill' in Malayalam and Sanskrit, 'brush' in some languages. The name stuck. As we gained experience both Indu and I started thinking 'publishing'.

The goal now was to make enough money to start our own publishing - which never happens we realized soon enough! So we just took the plunge. Without giving it too much thought we both retained the name Tulika for our respective publishing houses - Tulika Publishers in Chennai publishes children's books and Tulika Books in Delhi publishes academic books.

Moving back to Chennai gave me the impetus to start Tulika Publishers in 1996. An old friend and colleague Sandhya Rao (she was with us in Tulika, Delhi) joined me and in the first year we brought out three books, two of them bilingual ('Line and Circle' and 'Number Birds') in English and Hindi, Tamil and Malayalam. The



FOR CHILDREN TO BE COMFORTABLE WITH READING IN THEIR OWN LANGUAGE THEY HAVE TO SEE IT AS EQUAL IN STATUS TO ENGLISH BOOKS. THEY HAVE TO FEEL THE SAME PRIDE OF OWNERSHIP, FIND THE SAME ENJOYMENT FROM READING THE BOOKS.

third one was a Hindi alphabet book ('Ka se Kapde Kaise').

When we showed the books to friends in the publishing world they were all most discouraging saying the books were far too expensive because they were so well produced! They were also skeptical about the bilingual concept. But both Sandhya and I were so convinced about what we were doing that there was no stopping us.

We started by doing books in English, Hindi, Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam as we could

handle these languages between us. In 2000, Pratham launched their Read India programme and wanted ten of our titles in four languages, three of them new. They wanted the ten titles in Hindi, Kannada, Marathi and Gujarati in three months! We jumped at the opportunity to add new languages.

A year later we added Telugu and two years later, Bangla. So now we do books in 9 languages - English, Hindi, Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu, Kannada, Marathi, Gujarati and Bangla.

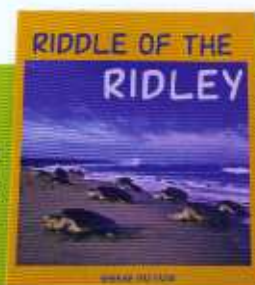
#### INTERESTING COLLABORATIONS

We get a lot of inquiries from young people who have liked our books. Many of them have high pressure jobs in design or animation, or are students - but would like to do a children's book. They are doing this on the side, or have jobs already - it's not all about the money. We are always making these connections. They do not have ego problems that established artists can have, the work is fresh and unjaded.

Going after them is hard work, but our alternative distribution channels have proven to be a blessing - the NGOs, government programs. All children's literacy programs require books, but there is great paucity. We have tied up with several regional publishers like the Kerala Government's

Kerala Balasahitya Institute. The print runs are big here, we get royalty on sales - and volumes make all the difference.

We have been trying ways to make work affordable and easily distributable to NGOs. Sometimes we do large prints on newsprint. Some work has been done with grants and sponsorship from corporate companies - like the four-part animals with photographs series supported by HSBC. ('Riddle of the Ridley', photo above, addresses the threat to the survival of the Olive Ridley turtles that come to nest on the eastern coastline of India).







BOOKS ARE NOT CHEAP PRODUCTS ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD AND THE BUYER HAS TO PAY THE PRICE FOR A GOOD BOOK JUST AS SHE/HE PAYS FOR A GOOD MEAL. THIS OF COURSE BRINGS UP THE UNFAIRNESS OF MAKING GOOD BOOKS INACCESSIBLE TO A MAJORITY.

It was not an easy decision and, from a business point of view then, perhaps foolish. It meant creating nine different markets for our books.

It would have been far easier financially, editorially and for production if we had stuck to just English and may be Hindi which had a good market. It has been a struggle but looking back I think we have, by going against

accepted trends, overturned notions of what makes good publishing sense. And we have gone on to become trendsetters in children's publishing in many ways!

We are now at a stage when the business is driven by the books in the different languages and our multilingual books our strongest asset. Though we are still struggling to find the market for a

couple of the languages we are keeping them alive by printing as few as 200 to 250 – print runs unheard of in publishing. But we are confident that books in these languages too will find a market soon.

#### MULTILINGUAL PUBLISHING AND DISTRIBUTION

Publishing in so many languages has been a huge learning curve for us in every aspect. For children to be comfortable with reading in their own language they have to see it as equal in status to English books. They have to feel the same pride of ownership, find the same enjoyment from reading the books. The look and feel of the book draws children to books as much as the content. It's their right to get the best books in whatever language they read.

Distribution is the biggest challenge primarily because of the price factor. We have resisted doing cheaper language editions and have kept to the same quality of production as English and kept the same prices. We were clear from the beginning that if we privileged the English books with a higher quality of production we

#### FOLK TALES AND BEYOND

Folk stories sell. The reason why parents pick up folk stories is their familiarity level with this kind of book – something tells them they won't go wrong. That is changing. Our earliest, best selling books were retellings of old folk stories – the writers interpreted stories their own way, but the stories were always contemporized.

Many of our titles, like 'Pranav's Picture' and 'I'm so Sleepy' (illustrated by NID students) are idea-based. 'I'm Different' is a multilingual book illustrated by noted author and illustrator Manjula Padmanabhan.

'What Shall I Make?', is about a child imagining things to do with the dough while his mother is making chapattis – it's written by a mom whose child actually did this.

While working on 'My Mother's Sari', we could have followed a certain formula to 'guarantee' success – made the illustrations exotic, pretty. We chose to go

against that, and follow our own vision. The child in the book is an average-looking child, the saris are of ordinary fabrics that you'd find in a household.

Our books go to villages, government schools, tribal schools (not just urban bookstores) – and we believe that nothing in our content should alienate the (non-urban) child. It is an editorial policy. That the 'My Mother's Sari' went on to garner perceptive reviews and awards was a big high for us.





would be undermining the very purpose of doing books in so many languages.

It was always thrown at us that by pricing our books high we were making the books inaccessible to the majority of children. But we were not targeting those sections who could not afford to buy books to begin with. Our primary target was the English book-buying segment who visited bookstores and we saw no reason to subsidise costs for them.

Books are not cheap products anywhere in the world and the buyer has to pay the price for a good book just as she/he pays for a good meal. This of course brings up the unfairness of making good books inaccessible to a majority. The solution to that was finding alternative distribution channels, not underpricing books. Over the years we have built a network of alternative channels through NGOs, government agencies and regional co-publishing.

Our books are regularly bought in bulk for reading literacy programmes and the volumes enable us to offer substantial discounts. Today there are probably more Tulika titles in government school libraries than in private school ones.

#### THE MATTER OF PRICING

The strategy of the same pricing for all languages is paying off as bookstores are increasingly looking for books in other languages – the same bookstores that refused to keep them a few years ago. We are also selling more and more through our website which caters to the more informed and aware buyers who don't hesitate to pay the price for good books whatever the language. And many of them

come to our site looking for good books in Indian languages.

#### ON WHAT COMES NEXT

Twelve years after we started, our books are seen as the best children's books in India and from India. Publishing in nine Indian languages has given us a unique understanding of the plural culture of the country, and this in turn is reflected in our books.

What has been most rewarding is that the same books that find their way to government school libraries in different languages have also won international acclaim and have been published in other countries. In short, the reach of the books is across the local, national and international, and cuts across linguistic, cultural and economic divides. And now they are crossing over into other media too. We will soon see the Aditi series of twelve books in

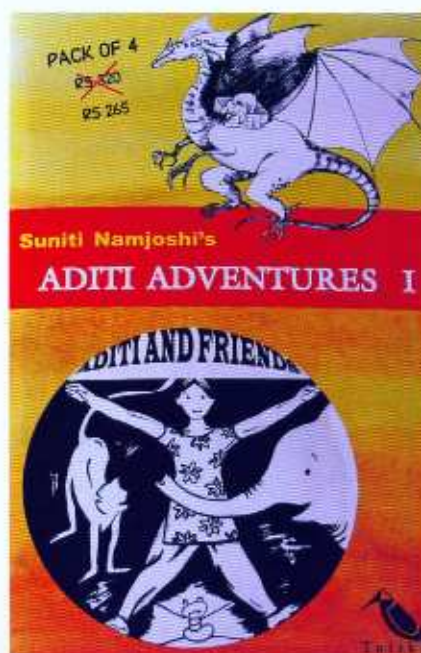
animation – a first for Indian animation and Indian publishing. This year we have brought out audio versions of some of our Hindi books for the US market.

Apart from the core team of ten in Chennai we have a team of committed associates helping in the marketing and distribution of books in different parts of the country and abroad. Then there is our expanding network of authors, illustrators and translators from all over the world – from well-known names to talented young first-timers (See box on page 33).

As for our publishing we will continue to explore and discover ways of creating a richly diverse range of books – contemporary, democratic and rooted in a multilingual, plural culture. ■

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO BUY TULIKA TITLES ONLINE VISIT [WWW.TULIKABOOKS.COM](http://WWW.TULIKABOOKS.COM)

WHAT HAS BEEN MOST REWARDING IS THAT THE SAME BOOKS THAT FIND THEIR WAY TO GOVERNMENT SCHOOL LIBRARIES IN DIFFERENT LANGUAGES HAVE ALSO WON INTERNATIONAL ACCLAIM AND HAVE BEEN PUBLISHED IN OTHER COUNTRIES.





# HISTORY ON THE STREETS

*6:30 AM. On a drizzly August morning, when auto rickshaws are mercifully few and far between on Bangalore roads, we made our way to Trinity Church – starting point of Roopa Pai's Victorian Bangalore Walk. We've walked up and down MG Road countless times before, and there was some skepticism about what new insights a walking tour would yield. We were in for a pleasant surprise.*

*In living cities, where real estate sharks do not blink before tearing down an old building and replacing it with towers of glass and concrete – a lot of the bygone must be recreated by word and imagination. Without putting a spoiler on the walk's itinerary and charming conclusion – suffice to say that our guide, Roopa Pai, was informative, animated and very engaging indeed – as interesting as the walk itself. She shares with us the story of how she came about this offbeat profession.*



TEXT: ROOPA PAI  
PHOTOS: MINDFIELDS TEAM, ROOPA PAI





BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF THE GARDEN CITY

**M**y dream job was to write for Target – the children's magazine – but like every other academically-bright middle-class South Indian child who wasn't going to inherit a business from her parents, I opted for the 'safe' path and did a 'professional course' instead. (Incidentally, my mom *still* introduces me as 'My daughter who is really an engineer, but now does some writing and tour guiding and things...'). Computer engineering degree in hand, I got married to Arun (Pai), my long-time boyfriend. I was twenty-two, he was twenty-three. One of the clauses

in our pre-nup was that Arun had to find a job as far away as possible from the fish bowl I grew up in! So en route to our honeymoon in Manali, we stopped in Delhi – to tie up both, *barsati* accommodation, and Target job. My life was made!

Vatsala Kaul, who had been trained by the legendary Rosalind Wilson, was my mentor at Target. She helped me develop a healthy respect for the slog involved in producing a great children's magazine. Because it was such a small team, all of us were involved with layouts, illustrations,

photography, and every aspect of production – great learning ground.

I worked with Target for two and a half years, and quit when Arun's work with Arthur Andersen took him to London. I am a great walking tour buff, and while in London, I had been on the Beatles Walk, the Jack the Ripper Walk, the Ghosts and Ghouls Walk, the City of London walk, and a bunch of others in the year that I was there. It was in London, too, that I discovered travel writing and started freelancing for the travel sections of Business Today, Femina, The Times of India, Economic





Times. After dabbling with an angel investment firm in Mumbai, and then with a online tutoring firm in the US – Arun decided to do something entirely on his own.

Arun and I had always had this thing about doing something together, but we had never really considered it very seriously. I harboured romantic ideas of becoming travel journalists – like Hugh and Colleen Gantzer – he could take the pictures and pitch the tent and protect me against leery men and strum the guitar and collect the cheques once the article had been published, and I would sit outside the tent watching the sunset and writing deathless prose. I don't think that idea ever appealed to him – wonder why. We moved to Bangalore in 2004. After a six month sabbatical – relaxing, ideating, exploring possibilities – we decided to start BangaloreWalks.

It must have been a tough decision, but I don't remember it like that. We certainly did not have any uncertainty-ridden late-night discussions or arguments. I have no head for money, and am usually blissfully unaware of how much – how little – there is in the bank, so I never worry. Arun is not at all impulsive, and is very pragmatic – so even if the decisions he arrives at may seem ill-considered and risky to other people, I know that he would have thought out all the pros and cons threadbare.

I had always been interested in history. Arun was the science guy who had become a sort of convert after our London walks, and developed an interest in history. While in the US, I couldn't help noticing how every little monument was made a big deal of, and how in India, we have so much to showcase but do nothing about it. We wanted to raise the level of the tourist experience in India, perhaps around well-known but not so visited historical sites (like Hampi). For Arun, what was most interesting was *how* the walk experience was delivered, how in spite of there being nothing to 'show' or 'see' in some of the walks we had been on, the guides had, by dint of great storytelling, managed to keep people riveted for two hours.

The first walk Arun designed was the Victorian Bangalore Walk (on MG

road), in July 2005. He ran about three months of trial walks, chopping, changing, and tweaking according to feedback and his own gut feel; struggling to get even friends to come along for free at 7 am on a Sunday morning. No one could believe we were actually going to charge 500 bucks for walking someone down MG Road and that we actually thought that was a decent business model! We had to sell the concept first, before we could sell a single ticket. Plus we had decided as a policy that we would never advertise. But the press was wonderful – they were uniformly appreciative, and wrote so glowingly about it that people's interest was piqued.

People started coming on the walks, in a trickle to begin with, and actually, until six months ago, it was difficult to be sure that more than six or seven people would land up. But in the last six months, after we hit Lonely Planet India (with the tagline 'Not to be missed!'), we expect a group size of at least 14 on each walk, with the number going up to 25 most Sundays.

The various walks are customized to suit different age groups. On childrens' walks, there is the challenge of constantly keeping things engaging and fun. We have conducted treasure hunts in churches (any team speaking above a whisper gets disqualified!), temples, museums, and malls, tug-of-war contests in old forts with teams named after the actual protagonists of an older war (Wellesley's Wizards, Nizam's Nightmares, Maratha Marauders, Tipu's Tigers, Sultan's Rockets, Lally's Legions), multiple-challenge contests at resorts with challenges that involve understanding the history of the place we are in. When we visit the 11<sup>th</sup> century temples of Belur and Halebid, we take along Bharatanatyam dancer Myna Bisineer, who gives a fabulous lec-dem before the temple visit – so that children can appreciate the sculptures in a completely different way than they



WHILE IN THE US, I COULDN'T HELP NOTICING HOW EVERY LITTLE MONUMENT WAS MADE A BIG DEAL OF, AND HOW IN INDIA, WE HAVE SO MUCH TO SHOWCASE BUT DO NOTHING ABOUT IT.



## ROOPA PAI'S FAVOURITE BANGALORE HAUNTS



- Vegetable and flower markets - some of the freshest produce in the country - particularly the leafy greens, which are an integral part of every Kannada meal - in the veggie markets. The most beautiful flowers anywhere in the flower markets.
- The traditional residential neighbourhood of Malleswaram, part of the landscape of my childhood. Change has come to Malleswaram too, but somehow the people and the feel and the smells - freshly ground coffee and jasmine - remain the same. It is my anchor in a city that is morphing at warp speed.
- Commercial Street - Century-old British shopping street with a bazaar feel. Great streetside shopping, apart from High Street brands, and always, always, even as 5000 immigrants a week move into the city, the real possibility of bumping into someone you know, proving that Bangalore is still a little town where everyone knows everyone.
- The IT parks - Very 21st century, very chrome and glass, very international, very high on the buzz. Thousands and thousands of bright young grads working together in some of the best-known companies in the world, their fresh faces and confident laughter affirming their absolute conviction that their future will be brighter than their parents'. India Shining? You bet!
- Any, but any, al fresco coffee shop that serves a good Americano on any one of the 365 beautiful Bangalore days a year.

would have otherwise. We take plenty of breaks, ensure there is plenty of refreshments and water, introduce worksheets for some quiet, reflective time, and keep things as interactive as possible.

For our nature walk, we give out sample bags, encourage them to touch, feel, pick up, smell, listen to and taste things - the nature walk is very popular as an alternative kind of birthday party! We also make sure that every single person on our team - there may be as many as five from our team on overnight school trips with large groups of children - is capable of connecting with the children individually. Each of us at Bangalore Walks, freelancers included, is well-qualified, and an interesting fun person in their own right. This is particularly important when we are dealing with teenagers - if they do not see as somewhat 'cool', we have lost the battle before it has begun.

The flagship Victorian Bangalore walk has remained almost exactly the same, although who the presenter is makes a difference. What Arun talks about may be a little different from what I talk about, depending on what each of us is interested in focusing on. There is, too, the Green Heritage Walk in Lalbagh, conducted by Vijay Thiruvady, a passionate environmentalist and a hugely knowledgeable tree person; and the Traditional Bengaluru walk, conducted by Savita Rao, a fulltime Bangalore Walks employee, who gave up a career in software to do this.

By now, the walks are now only a small part of what we do. In the last three years, the organization has grown organically around the walks, with people finding reasons to use our content (and us) in ways we hadn't even imagined. We now organize school trips, help global CEOs and management teams understand their Indian employees, perform an original musical called 'Bangalore!' involving

live musicians, dancers, visuals, and narrative, and telling the story of the city, work with the Karnataka tourism department to showcase the city for visiting ministerial delegations from across the world, help visiting international student groups get an India immersion experience over a whole week, and more.

I had always wanted to tell stories through my writing - now I do it verbally. I did the same things as a journalist - but seldom received feedback on my work, and often wondered how it was received, if it had made any impact. Here I know instantly how my stories have been received, and I know that they have made an impact. Plus, people are always asking questions or telling us bits of trivia that send us haring off on another exciting information chase. It feels great to pass on something that I feel passionately about to other people, and rekindle an interest in history in them. I am helped by the fact that history is usually taught very badly in schools, so people come with very low expectations of a history walk - assuming it will be educational but boring. It is a great high to see them not only very pleasantly surprised that history can actually be interesting and fun, but also ready to buy a couple of books themselves and set off on their own historical quests. ■



FOR MORE INFORMATION ON BANGALORE WALKS  
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WWW.BANGALOREWALKS.COM



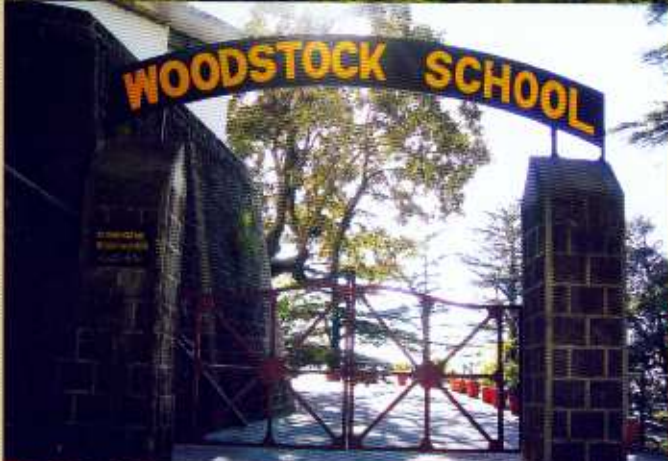
TEXT: NIGEL KUMAR  
PHOTO INPUT: PETE WILDMAN, WOODSTOCK SCHOOL

After having made the social and academic adjustments needed to transition from a normal (read, Indian) school to an international school, there were three key ways in which Woodstock impacted my life. Firstly, Woodstock provided an environment of reduced academic pressure. I was a poor student, often in the bottom half of the class - but I was struck by the philosophy of

[illegible]

Mid-1985, before I came to Woodstock, was spent shunting from one school entrance exam to another - I failed each and every one of them.









I HAVE LEARNED THAT A GOOD SCHOOL IS NOT ABOUT FACILITIES OR PROGRAMS BUT PRIMARILY ABOUT GOOD TEACHERS.

Secondly, Woodstock exposed and even encouraged me towards diverse learning activities. While multiple non-academic activities are quite common in most residential schools, the programs at Woodstock weren't actually "extra" curricular - as if to suggest that the non-academic activities were outside the main learning environment. Rather, non-academic activities were co-curricular, in that they were conceived as running alongside the academic programs. Equal emphasis was given to music and drama, within the class schedules.

Some of my friends even majored in music! As a result, I know that even though I often had poor grades in my classes, my above average contribution in music, drama and running allowed my teachers to see me as a 'good' student. That helped me tremendously to gain confidence, and to realise that success was not unipolar (if you don't get good grades you don't succeed). It showed me that you can be good in many things besides studies and still be happy and functional.

Thirdly, there were teachers who took a special interest in my work and character. Everyone has a story to share about one or two teachers who changed their life. And that's precisely my point. I have learned

that a good school is not about facilities or programs but primarily about good teachers. In my six years at Woodstock, there were many teachers who significantly made an impact on my life, without whom I would have never made it. One of my teachers encouraged me to improvise while playing music. Another teacher taught me most of the study skills I use today. Another teacher forgave me when I got "caught". And yet another teacher inspired me to think beyond my own needs and see my responsibility towards God and fellow human beings.

In fact, I must digress to add that of late schools have begun to talk more about value-based education - by which they often mean some character-transformation that is imparted to students alongside academics. I have yet to see a single value that can sensibly or effectively be transmitted to students by teaching. Rather, in my school (and beyond) I have seen that value-based education is only possible when it is imparted by motivated teachers who value their students. In other words, my character was shaped by the character of my teachers who cared about us.

As I look back at this list, I know it is not exhaustive. There are so many other ways that Woodstock School became an arena of transformation for me. The location for one - the Himalayas form an exquisite backdrop to school. Or my friends - they were from all over the world, but we never saw each other as regional or national groups, rather as equals. In fact, it was only after I attended college that I started

noticing a regionalism that was so rampant in many learning institutions.

Detractors say that Woodstock gives weak students an easy ride, and that academic success is critical for a school student. To them, I would only want to say that I'm currently pursuing my doctoral studies, and looking towards a full-time career in higher academics. A change came about in person during my learning journey at Woodstock - to the extent that I actually took to the same 'studies' that I had dreaded and hated for the longest time.


There are many reasons behind this transformation - but a large reason is the grace I received at Woodstock. The teachers did not push me too hard, and the teaching methods encouraged a holistic learning approach that included research, discussions. These were the foundational study skills that eventually helped me become a better student. Though if I were to give the board exams today, I would still fare miserably!

Finally, a disclaimer. Too many alumni have a nostalgic picture of their old school and forget how their school needs to move with the times. I passed out of Woodstock school in 1992 - the people who impacted me at the school are mostly all gone. Now with a new generation of teachers in the school - I can only hope that years down the line, another old student from Woodstock would still be able to write an article such as this, honestly proclaiming that their schooling experience changed their life! ■



NIGEL AMY KUMAR is a doctoral student at SAIACS, Bangalore and is currently wondering whether he will finish his dissertation before his one-year old daughter turns 18! He is married to Seleno who has been a "teacher" in an alternative learning environment and is currently a "homemaker". Nigel swears that everything he now believes about education and children has been reshaped because of his interactions with her.





I've been feeling  
a little *dispensible*  
lately...

# ALL OUT CHESS

ONLY A CULTURE THAT CAN QUESTION ITS PAST AND PRESENT KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS WILL SEE THE GENESIS OF NEW THOUGHT. A UNIQUE NEW FORM OF AN AGE-OLD GAME SET RAJ MAHATME THINKING ABOUT LIFE ITSELF.

The game of chess draws to a close when a king is killed. Much like the way wars were waged, historically. When all power and authority lies vested in one king, his death meant sure defeat - and in battle or in game, there were no two ways about it. Until a group of children I know taught me otherwise.

'All Out Chess' is a version of the game where the fight doesn't end when a king is knocked off the board. I was mesmerised. And as the game progressed beyond the checkmate, it threw some more interesting surprises.

Let us identify the two players as X and Y. At the time of checkmate, X had almost twice the pieces on board and it was a foregone conclusion that X would win. X had larger resources, was in attack mode and continued

with unflagging spirit. Y, on the other hand, was fighting with a smaller army and began to display different skills. He began to use the 'fight and flight' technique with devastating effect. Soon, the game had turned from the engagement of two armies to that of one army and one guerrilla force. X refused to change his style

of attacking with a large army backing him. Y, on his part, proved to be a master of guerrilla warfare. Within fifteen minutes, they both had only their queens on the board! X displayed rigidity throughout; Y displayed flexibility, and willingness to adapt. The game was a draw, but to me, it was the undisputed victory of flexibility over rigidity.

In the corporate world, organisations that encourage a healthy questioning attitude earn the sobriquet 'Learning Organisations'. They are often the organisations that lead their domain. There is a dire need for this attitude to percolate into other aspects of society. It isn't an easy thing to do in India, considering our 'tradition' of not questioning the authority and word of elders. But the earlier we start honing our questioning streak, the better. Only

a culture that can question its past and present knowledge systems will see the genesis of new thought.

A fundamental question that ought to be asked of *all* educational curricula is - does this encourage questions that have multiple solutions? Most problems in life have several solutions, not one. Problems that have unique solutions are convenient for teachers but bad for students - since they need a constant ratifying nod from the 'authority' (teacher) to verify the 'correctness' of the solution. No wonder our schools create the kind of people that the Industry needs to immediately pack off to training programs like 'Six Thinking Hats'! A system that accepts the possibility of multiple solutions will create a generation that has belief in its ability to generate solutions. A generation that has the capacity to ask - Why should a game of chess stop when the king is killed? ■



RAJ MAHATME studied engineering, realised he understood machines but not people, began to study human behaviour passionately.

Teaches Individual and Organisational Behaviour at MES College, Goa.



# OF PLAY AND PEACE

TEXT: MINDFIELDS TEAM, AND PLAY  
PHOTOS: COURTESY VISHWAS PARCHURE





While on a mountaineering expedition, corporate trainer and educator Vishwas Parchure found himself on a snow-clad Himalayan peak, scanning the mountain ranges below. He was struck by a sudden realisation. "I felt I had been doing nothing meaningful in my life. At that moment, I decided that I would not work just for money." He chucked his cushy corporate job, started teaching in Welham Boys' School, Dehra Dun, because he enjoyed teaching. "The minute money stops becoming the motivating factor, doors and windows open."

#### THE GENESIS OF PLAY

While on a visit to the USA in the year 2000, Parchure happened to meet people who worked with the international organisation, Play for Peace. Eminent leaders like His Holiness the Dalai Lama and South Africa's Nelson Mandela have supported the model of Play for Peace, and the idea that play can teach children the basic human values irrespective of what culture, race and belief they belong to.

Fascinated by the idea of using play to bring about peace, he decided to bring the concept back with him to India - a country that has a depressing track record of communal violence. "If our society is to become more peaceful, our children need to have role models like the Dalai Lama," asserts Parchure. And so PLAY (formerly Play for Peace, India) was born.

#### THE OBJECTIVES OF PLAY

PLAY interacts with community-based NGOs who serve as partners for long-term implementation of goals. They train youth from conflict-ridden communities in non-competitive, co-operative gaming techniques. The youth facilitators, many of whom are school dropouts, organise games for children.



OUTREACH

PLAY SEEKS TO PREVENT VIOLENCE IN CONFLICT-TORN AREAS BY TEACHING PEOPLE TO LIVE, PLAY, AND WORK TOGETHER. IT WORKS LOCALLY THROUGH COMMUNITY LEADERS AND YOUTH FACILITATORS TO TEACH CHILDREN, TEENS, AND ADULTS TO TRUST AND RESPECT OTHERS, AND TO BREAK DOWN GENERATIONS OF CULTURAL BARRIERS.

Play for Peace is a process of developing leaders - local leaders who have a vested interest in positive change, and who can most effectively advocate for those changes within their communities.

Because the focus of Play for Peace is on creating more positive paths of social development for children and youth, we emphasize the need for teen leaders within these communities. Local youth, with the guidance and involvement of local adults, can easily win the respect of those children we need to reach and help.

#### THE POWER OF PLAY

Play so important. Play can be a path to peace - a long-term solution to intractable patterns of violence. In a pure state of play, defenses crumble and people are no longer conscious of the self. When we laugh, fear melts away. The atmosphere of play enables people to connect directly, unfettered by prevailing prejudices.

Attitudes change and people connect as they open their hearts to new friendships once considered impossible. Rather than looking backward to clashes and heartache, people look forward in a spirit of collaboration and conciliation. Former enemies come together to create a place to coexist in peace.

#### THE BIOLOGY OF PLAY

Human beings remember emotion-laden events far better than neutral experiences, which is one reason why moments of joy or despair can leave profound, ineradicable impressions.

The buoyant emotional charge of play, according to some neuroscientists, can spark chemical processes that help the formation of strong memories. Positive encounters of any kind will encourage the growth of new pathways in the brain's networks. And positive encounters with people considered different (people whom children might normally be taught to fear, taunt, hate)





THE BUOYANT EMOTIONAL CHARGE OF PLAY CAN SPARK CHEMICAL PROCESSES THAT HELP THE FORMATION OF STRONG MEMORIES. POSITIVE ENCOUNTERS WITH PEOPLE CONSIDERED DIFFERENT (PEOPLE WHOM CHILDREN MIGHT NORMALLY BE TAUGHT TO FEAR, TAUNT, HATE) WILL LEAD TO LONG-TERM, POSITIVE HARD-WIRING OF THE BRAIN'S LIMBIC SYSTEM, THE SEAT OF THE EMOTIONS.

will lead to long-term, positive hard-wiring of the brain's limbic system, the seat of the emotions. Play and highly-charged, energetic positive interactions will form the foundation for a new mindset.

#### FROM VISION TO REALITY

##### 2000, HYDERABAD

The communal riots in Hyderabad in 2000 threatened to destroy the social fabric of this timeless secular city. PLAY partnered with Confederation of Voluntary Associations (COVA) to create a consortium of 200 voluntary community action agencies to help create community empowerment that

was free from any affiliations with religious or political parties.

##### 2002, GUJARAT

In 2002, PLAY worked to meet the educational and emotional needs of children who became refugees in the aftermath of the violent riots. Using the same methods of cooperative play that helped alleviate communal tension in Hyderabad, PLAY trooped on to promote an attitude of acceptance toward all religions, and helped the children regain trust.

##### 2004, TSUNAMI

In 2004 Tsunami struck the coast of the India Ocean taking the lives of

about 18,000 people and displacing over 600,000 people in India. PLAY created special projects to help the youth of the affected communities. Volunteers were trained in Peace Therapy in relief camps. On islands far from main land India, where the worst devastation occurred, youth were trained to work with children in newly established activity centers.

The same year saw PLAY partner with the Asian South Pacific Bureau for Adult Education in Hyderabad to develop a tool kit for peace educators in South Asia.

##### 2006, CHILDLINE

PLAY trained outreach workers of Childline (a 24/7 helpline to help children in distress in over 75 districts) in four regions of India.

##### 2007 ONWARDS

PLAY has partnered with various organizations like Dream a Dream, World Vision, Child Line, Action Aid, Catholic Relief Services, Oxfam Child



#### OBJECTIVES OF PLAY

To promote positive relationships among the people of societies in conflict.

To foster leaders for peace

To build self-sustaining learning

communities in which different regions work interdependently to build a peaceful world.

To create a non-threatening environment, free from fear, in which people of all ages can experience the joy of play.

To create long-lasting positive changes in our regions, we must rely on members of those communities to pioneer and guide the changes.



Rights and Shavishav.

In June 2008 the book was released in Nepal and Play for Peace India has been actively contributing in facilitating workshops to popularize the tool kit.

Since 2007 Play for Peace is offering a module based training approach to develop teenage/young leaders in community with a mix of training and field work. Right now World Vision India in 5 of its project is developing young leaders through that approach. ■

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT PLAY WRITE TO  
VISHWAS PARCHURE AT CHALLOPS@GMAIL.COM



IN 2002, PLAY WORKED TO MEET THE EDUCATIONAL AND EMOTIONAL NEEDS OF CHILDREN WHO BECAME REFUGEES IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE VIOLENT GUJARAT RIOTS.

## SOME GAMING TECHNIQUES USED BY PLAY

### ANIMALS

Person in the middle of the circle goes around pointing to different people, saying 'elephant', 'rabbit', and 'giraffe'.

**Elephant:** Person who is pointed to stretches one hand in front and holds his nose with the other hand, but by bringing it from under the first stretched hand. The two people to his sides, turn to him, and make his 2 years by taking one hand to his hand and the other to her waist, and move them like elephant does.

**Rabbit:** The person who is pointed to takes both his hands to his head and makes a victory sign with both of them indicating rabbit ears, she also bends down a little and shows their teeth. The 2 people to her 2 sides stamp the ground with their feet, which is away from the center person.

**Giraffe:** The person who is pointed at stands up tall with both his hands trying to reach for the sky. Persons on his side bend down towards him and touch his knees symbolising long legs. Now all these actions are performed in sets of three, once the action is done you can come back to your normal standing position after a second or two. Out of three if anyone does a wrong action or is late in responding, that person replaces the person in the center now it

is his job to go to different people in the circle and point to them asking for one of the action. The first person in circle should take the place of person replacing him.



### EIGHT STEP DANCE

Ask everyone to follow you. Tell them that dance proceeds in the rounds of 8, 4, 2, 1. The steps are shake your left hand high in the air 8 times then the right hand, left leg, right leg and then shake your kamar / waist, all 8 times. The next round repeats the same action, but 4 times only, and then 2 and 1.

### MAKAN MALIK & KIRAYEDAR

Groups of 3 have to be made. Now 2 people stand with their hands joined in the form of an arch of a house. Together they are Mekan Malik (Landlords). The third person stands inside the

arch he is the Kirayedar (tenant). Now when the facilitator says 'Makanmalik' all the pairs forming the houses move out and look for a new Kirayedar, the Kirayedar stands in their place. If the facilitator says 'Kirayedar' then the Kirayedar (tenants) move out of their houses and look for a new house, this time the makanmaliks stay at their places.

If the facilitator says 'earthquake' (jaljala) then everyone breaks out and people can form new groups and different people can come together to make new houses and find new Kirayedar (tenants). If some houses are left vacant ask them to break and become Kirayedar. We can give them a count (say of 5) in which new houses are to be formed and Kirayedar needs to occupy their houses.

### BULL RING

A game using prop, A 2 inch metal ring with strings attached to it, placed on the ground inside a pipe. The pipe has a ball resting on top, the group has to work together to deliver the ball to another location.

### HUMAN BRIDGE

Using group members as the only resource the team has to bridge the gap between two points. The challenge is to do it using minimum contact point with the ground.





## MS. MIMI'S SPANISH CLASS

An Argentinian national living and teaching in India for a decade - Mimi Maruri is a painter by training, jewelry designer by hobby, and Spanish language teacher by profession. She is also a consummate polyglot who can speak, think and write in Spanish, English, Italian and French.

TEXT: MINDFIELDS TEAM  
PHOTO COURTESY: MIMI MARURI

IF NOT A TEACHER THEN WHAT?

A singer maybe. Or a film director.

WHAT FILMS DO YOU LIKE?

All sorts - even horror films, films with ghosts in them. I don't like going to crowded movie theatres, so I buy around 10-15 films a month and watch them at home. Early in the morning, 5 AM, before heading to school.

YOU HAVE A DEGREE IN PAINTING, HOW DID YOU BECOME A TEACHER OF SPANISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE?

I like teaching, but I knew I didn't want to teach fine art. So I started off teaching English as a second language in Argentina, and worked as a translator.

I started traveling around that time, and my travels brought me to India - where I started working as a freelance translator, Spanish to English and vice-



versa. Starting to teach Spanish was the next step.

SPANISH IS BECOMING A POPULAR LANGUAGE THE WORLD OVER, BUT THAT WASN'T THE CASE A DECADE AGO, WHEN YOU STARTED YOUR CAREER...

French, German, Italian – all sorts of languages are accepted and spoken around the world – but Spanish as a second language was never popular until very recently. We never thought that our language was for other people in the world. We never thought that people would be interested enough in Spanish.

Back then, there were very few books published that dealt with Spanish translation, and most of them were meant for immigrants to Spanish-speaking countries. They were not suitable for teaching or learning Spanish as a second language. So I developed my own program, created a methodology on the basis of my observations.

HOW IS IT LIKE TO TEACH SPANISH IN INDIA?

Different cultures have their own unique way of learning, and I have had to adapt. Teaching Germans how to speak Spanish is different from teaching Indians to speak Spanish. The biggest obstacle here is grammar – its not a strong point with Indians. And this is not a specific problem with Spanish grammar. Grammar is grammar in every language, and every language has grammar.

YOU HAVE TAUGHT PEOPLE RANGING FROM FIRST GRADERS TO COMPANY EXECUTIVES. HOW DO YOU PUT TOGETHER TEACHING MATERIAL?

*(Laughs)* Painstakingly. When I started researching for material to prepare classes, I really didn't find any. The most important

thing to source are good books. And good books for younger age groups are even harder to find. The books that exist – either they are not meant for learners of Spanish as a second language, or I don't agree with the methodology. Many times these books are about messages and phrases you have to learn by heart. By now I have put together my material – different things for different age groups. Every year, I keep discovering more things...

CONSIDERING THAT THERE ARE NO EQUIVALENTS OF ALLIANCE FRANCAISE OR MAX MUELLER BHAVAN AROUND WHERE STUDENTS MAY ABSORB SPANISH LANGUAGE AND CULTURE, HOW DO YOU FILL THE GAP...

Unlike French or German, Spanish isn't the domain of one specific country. Smaller organization like Instituto Cervantes teach the language through Spain, but there isn't one big unified institute (like Alliance Francaise or Istituto Dante Alighieri) funded and run by a specific government. And its not like my students can step out on the road here and practice speaking the language either.

Instead, I try to make things creative and real inside the classroom. The walls are covered with everyday things related to culture – as many posters, magazines, brochures I can find. My school kids have projects that are connected with real life – like creating an advertisement, or a menu card. Some years back, the older children wrote and illustrated storybooks in Spanish for the younger learners. Then we laminated and spiral bound the books.

We often have music in our class, as part of the lesson. I bring objects and reading material from my travels to share with the

students. These things are important for a language. And I get bored very easily so I have to invent new ideas every semester!

YOU ARE A KEEN TRAVELLER. WHAT PLACES INTEREST YOU? WHAT ERA OF WORLD HISTORY?

I'm not a nature person or a shopping person – so no Australia, no Dubai. I only travel to places of historical significance.

The Roman empire has got to be one of my favourites – I don't even really know why I like it so much, they were quite brutal and not as 'cultural' as the Greeks!

TELL US ABOUT YOUR INTEREST IN DESIGNING JEWELLERY...THE NECKPIECE YOU ARE WEARING IS QUITE FASCINATING...

This piece you are looking at – it's a piece of ceramic made by a tribe in South Africa, and I got it 'framed' into a pendant. I'm always looking for special things to use in my jewellery – things that *mean* something.

I work predominantly in silver and gemstones. I don't like gold too much.

WHAT DO YOU CARRY IN YOUR BAG TO SCHOOL EVERYDAY?

Mineral water, an umbrella, book to read, my bathing suit. There is a pool in school, but I amn't swimming so much lately. I carry a book to read – right now it's a book by Isaac Asimov.

I read a lot of Spanish authors, and it's hard to find books. So every time I go to Argentina, I take back a bag full of books that I have already read, and bring a bag full of new ones! ■





# RECOMMENDED READING

TEXT: ARAVINDA A.

COURTESY: WWW.THEHIPPOCAMPUS.COM



## SINGING FOR MRS PETTIGREW

A STORY-MAKER'S JOURNEY

By Michael Morpurgo

What a book this is! We picked it up recently for the library and I forced myself to slow down because I just didn't want the book to end. For those who have not heard of Morpurgo, he was Children's Laureate from 2003-05 and a prolific writer (author of over a hundred books!).

*Singing for Mrs Pettigrew* is a collection of his essays and short stories, which take the reader through the things that shaped Morpurgo's life and his career. Calling himself a "grower of stories" he alternates incidents from his life and links it to the short story that came from it. Morpurgo's magic lies in how personal the stories feel and how honest they are. A lot of the stories in the collection are in first person and you almost sense the memories he has lingered with the writer long enough to be woven into a story. There are 11 stories and the ones I love a little more than the others are 'Meeting Cezanne', 'I Believe in Unicorns', 'My Father is a Polar Bear', and 'The Mozart Question'.

The reason I've recommended it for teachers is because it somehow reminded me of my own childhood, going back to things that I cherish. Of school, the teachers I remember are those who were able to earn my affection. Physics was a favourite subject during the one year that Sr Savio taught it because this gentle nun never lost her temper. She spent more time teaching us prayers preferring them to trivial pursuits of Energy and Matter. With a few other teachers, their obvious love for the subject kept me hooked long enough to either fall in love

it with it myself (as it happened with Literature) or keep at a distance (Human Physiology). It allows for a lot of introspection and prods the reader very gently to dig out his memories, as he himself has done.

Morpurgo brings alive those aspects of one's childhood – showing how a story-maker picks from his own life to weave a tale. It's not an autobiography for what he offers the reader is a "deeper insight" to maybe appreciate the stories a little more. Perhaps there are, among your wards, those who dream of becoming a writer and this book will make for a great companion on that journey.



## THE ADVENTURES OF FELUDA

By Satyajit Ray

Ages 9 and above

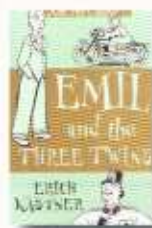
Feluda is not the title of any one of Satyajit Ray's books but sitting down, I found it hard to single out any one book out of the collection. There's something supremely satisfying about reading a Feluda story. It evokes a certain complete-ness of experience that only a well-crafted detective novel can do. I can go on and on but here's some background to the books themselves.

Feluda is one of Ray's best-known literary creations. A super sharp detective, Pradosh Mitter aka Feluda by the *bhadralok* reminds one of Holmes but is closer home since the Kolkata of Feluda carries the whiff of mustard oil and the cacophony of honking vehicles. Like Holmes, Feluda has a trusting companion, his cousin Topshe and the two are often joined by Lalmohan Babu who is a bit of a bungling writer. Together, they solve mysteries that baffle the best minds in the business. Feluda, of course, is the perfect detective – cool and composed with a razor



sharp mind. The stories, although written years ago (the first Feluda story appeared in 1961, in Sandesh, a Bengali children's magazine started by Ray's grandfather) don't feel dated. Perhaps the only time you realize that it's from a different decade is when Feluda lights his cigarette, so un-politically correct for a children's book nowadays.

Ray wrote in Bengali and in all 35 Feluda stories made their way into the lives of his readers creating a fan following that still exists in Bengal and now to the rest of the country. Indian publishers looking, I assume, for 'quality' children's writing, struck gold with these stories. The translations I have been reading are by Gopa Majumdar and Chitrita Banerjee for Puffin Books. Having never read the original in Bengali (despite buying a copy of Learn Bengali in 30 days) I can only say that they were thoroughly enjoyable and I recommend them with all the gusto I can muster. Look out for these books, published under the series, The Adventures of Feluda, by Penguin India.



### EMIL AND THE THREE TWINS

By Erich Kastner

Ages 9 to 12

This is not a new book (published in 1931) but while looking for more stories of sleuths and detectives, I wandered around the library and this book stood out. Three twins? That's a mystery to solve in itself, I thought, as I picked it off the shelf.

I quickly realized that this was the second book in the series (seem to be making a habit of it!) but Kastner endeared himself to me with his two introductions to *Emil and the Three Twins* – the first for beginners who haven't read the first title, *Emil and the Detectives*, and another for experts who are ready for the next adventure.

Originally written in German after the First World War, the book is simply marvelous. Emil's friend, the Professor has just inherited a house in the seaside and wants to invite his friends, Emil, Gustav and Little Tuesday. Here, even as they begin to enjoy their holiday, adventure comes in the form of an acrobat and his twins. The plot thickens with the acrobat hatching a plan to give up on one twin who's getting too heavy for the job. Emil and his friends are horrified that a father could do such a thing and decide to save the twin from this tragedy by foiling the plan.

It's a rather mad book but so thoroughly enjoyable. Kastner lived through both the world wars and was against the Nazi rule. Consequently his books were banned in Germany during the Second World War. A quick look at Wikipedia will reveal a talented and a prolific writer for children. What works for *Emil and the Three Twins* is that it is an unpretentious story that spills very easily into the author's world, seeming almost real and not entirely fictional. And I found it to a refreshing change from the later books – the American sleuth teams of Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys, or the British Famous Five sort of mysteries that somehow takeover this genre.

### THE GOOD READING GUIDE

- Ben's Trumpet by Rachel Isadora Ages 5 to 7
- Boys and Girls of the World (My World) Ages 5 to 7
- The Helping Hand by Kamakshi Balasubramanian Ages 5 to 7
- The Mischief Maker (The Adventures of Lola and Woolly) Ages 5 to 7
- A Visit with Benjamin Franklin (A Visit with) Ages 7 to 9
- Dog Detective Ranjha by Partap Sharma Ages 7 to 9
- Nate the Great and the Missing Pillowcase (Nate the Great) Ages 7 to 9
- Who Moved My Cheese for Kids by Spencer Johnson and Christian Johnson Ages 7 and above
- Emil and the Three Twins by Erich Kastner Ages 9 to 12
- Four Heroes and a Green Beard by Narayan Gangopadhyay Ages 9 to 12
- Feluda by Satyajit Ray Ages 9 and above
- Sammy Keyes and the Hotel Thief by Wendelin Van Draanen Ages 9 and above
- Fairy-tale Detectives (the Sisters Grimm series) by Michael Buckley Ages 9 to 12
- From the Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler by EL Konigurg Ages 9 and above
- Red Sky in the Morning by Elizabeth Laird Ages 12 and above
- Stormbreaker (Alex Rider series) by Anthony Horowitz Ages 12 and above
- Palace of Laughter by Jon Berkeley Ages 12 and above
- The Case of the Captive Clairvoyant (The Baker Street Boys) Ages 12 and above
- Singing for Mrs Pettigrew, a story-maker's journey by Michael Morpurgo For teachers
- The No.1 Ladies Detective Agency by Alexander McCall Smith For teachers



ARAVINDA A.

Joined Hippocampus to be around books. Likes writing and tries to earn a living from it. Loves the company of dogs. Agrees completely with the anon Zen master who said, "I never got lost because I don't know where I'm going."



# MUSTWATCH

Three films by Indian directors - evocative and fable-like, with protagonists on a quest for something beautiful and true. Recommended by Iggy Ahluwalia, film fiend who has dabbled with line producing, set & production styling, and direction.

## THE BLUE UMBRELLA



2005  
Director: Vishal Bharadwaj  
Cast: Pankaj Kapur, Shreya Sharma,  
Doily Ahluwalia  
Runtime: 90 mins  
Language: Hindi

### Synopsis:

Young Biniya lives a poor lifestyle in a small village in mountainous and snowy Himachal Pradesh along with her widowed mother and wrestler brother. She entertains various tourists, and while doing so with some tourists from Japan, trades in her bear-tooth amulet with a blue umbrella.

She and her umbrella become very popular with both tourists and the local villagers. A restaurant-owner, Nandkishore Khatri, takes a fancy to this umbrella and attempts several times to buy it off of her - in vain. Then one day while tending to her two cows, the umbrella goes missing. The entire village sympathizes with her. She suspects Nandkishore, and the police turn his house upside down but are unable to locate the missing umbrella.

An embittered and upset Nandkishore orders a red-and-white Japanese umbrella and, in

turn, becomes immensely popular with the local villagers as well as with tourists. The question remains: where did Biniya's umbrella disappear to, and will she ever recover it?

## MALLI



1999  
Director: Santosh Sivan  
Cast: P. Shwetha, Priya, Janagaraj,  
Parameshwaran  
Runtime: 87 mins  
Language: Tamil

### Synopsis:

A magical portrait of the inner life of Malli, a poor eight-year old girl. Malli works to help her parents collect firewood and plays with her best friend, the deaf and mute daughter of a middle class family. She longs for a new bright yellow. During her quest she meets an old, local storyteller, who shares with her a story of a magical blue stone that can cure her best friend's muteness.

With new horizons to pursue, she sets off to find this mysterious blue wishing stone, and a magical blue bead that purportedly will restore her friend's hearing. Depicted with a surreal, occasionally nightmarish texture, the film lyrically shows

both the easy friendships and bitter disappointments of childhood and the power of the imagination.

## MAKDEE



2002  
Director: Vishal Bharadwaj  
Cast: Shweta Prasad, Shabana Azmi,  
Makrand Deshpande  
Language: Hindi

### Synopsis:

In a small North Indian village, Legend has it that a 100 years-old witch lives in an abandoned mansion on the village outskirts, and any person who goes inside is turned into an animal. In the same village a clever, naughty girl named Chunni lives with her widowed father, grandmother and her identical twin Munni, who is just the exact opposite of Chunni in mannerisms.

One day, Chunni's prank causes Munni enters the witch's mansion and the witch turns her into a hen. Chunni strikes a deal with Makdee - that she will present Makdee with 100 hens in exchange for Munni in human form. How she manages this task forms the crux of the rest of this fun-filled children's movie. ■



# 'L' is for Letting Be

What adults often forget is that boredom is the mother of invention!

TEXT: GOURI DANGE  
ILLUSTRATION: AMRUTA PATIL



Today, we are terrified of our kids being bored. What we overlook, is that boredom is the mother of invention! Countless imaginative games, activities, jokes, projects and conversations have emerged from the fact that a bunch of children were 'bored' in their holidays and had to invent a way to entertain themselves.

We complain that kids lack focus and end up daydreaming during school hours. One reason why this happens is that children are so over-supervised at home, their time is so accounted for - many of them find it easier to 'disconnect' and unwind in class, where they can be physically present, and no one will notice that their minds have wandered off. Lack of concentration and distracted behaviour, then become the common complaints voiced by parents and teachers.

We, as adults, need to learn the valuable art of Letting Be. So that the natural instinct for exploration, discovery, invention, enjoyment and relaxation can take over, and children be children again. ■

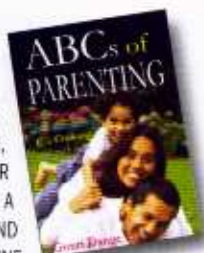
Most kids today are far too supervised. Their time is accounted for, minute-to-minute. We have become a severely activity-oriented society - adults and children. There seems to be no scope to simply sit around, or potter around, or scribble idly. All these are seen as a 'waste of time'. In our bid to become conscientious and efficient parents, many of us are attached to the notion that everybody should be either busy or asleep!

Besides their studies and mundane daily activities, we push children into 'creative activities' - again, for a supervised, regulated, clearly demarcated time. While this may be enjoyable for kids, it doesn't always translate into enhanced creativity - or relaxation, for that matter. Creativity, like relaxation, needs

vacant space, where the mind is allowed to run in meandering directions - not all of them 'fruitful' in any immediate sense. We send kids to a creativity workshop so that they come home with a painting, collage or picture frame. We send them to cricket coaching, so that they get a break from studies and the benefit of sports. But we rarely give them the leisure to 'aimlessly' stare into space or imagine things.

Remember your childhood pastime of bouncing a rubber ball between palm and ground, without a break? Remember 'playing around' with different kinds of lettering or doodles on paper? This was not 'sport' or 'creativity' in the modern sense of the terms - but it was relaxing, enjoyable, and may even have enhanced your hand-eye co-ordination and drawing skill!

GOURI DANGE IS THE AUTHOR OF 'ABC'S OF PARENTING' (RS. 175, JAICO BOOKS, 2008) AND '3 ZAKIA MANSION' (PENGUIN, 2008) AND A COLUMNIST FOR MINT-LOUNGE. SHE IS A PRACTICING COUNSELLOR AND DIVIDES HER TIME BETWEEN PUNE AND MUMBAI.





# NEWSBYTES

## **HIMACHAL PRADESH TOPS IN EDUCATION, HEALTH**

Shimla: Himachal Pradesh has been once again ranked the best-governed state in the country with regard to progress in road connectivity and social sectors like education and health, an official statement said on Tuesday.

The hill state has been adjudged the first state in the country to achieve the target of universalisation of elementary education and 100 percent literacy, even ahead of Kerala. The statement said the state has 20 percent enrolment in colleges, which is twice the national average.

## **TEACHERS MAY WORK TILL THE AGE OF SIXTY FIVE YEARS**

New Delhi: Raising the retirement age for university and college teachers to 65 years and taking up measures to break stagnation in their career growth are among a set of steps that the UGC-appointed pay-revision committee will recommend for making the profession attractive.

The committee headed by G K Chadha met here on Sunday and decided to suggest provision of additional incentives at entry level for teachers and a set of new benefits to ensure that teachers get a "decent deal".

"At present, the retirement age varies from state to state. There are states where it is 55 years, while certain states have 58, 60,

62 and 65. We will suggest 65 years which will be of immense benefit for institutions and students," Chadha told reporters.

Besides, the career of teachers becomes stagnant after a certain stage. The committee will look at ways to break the stagnation to bring the enthusiasm back to teachers. The committee will suggest additional incentives at entry level which could be in the form of some kind of academic allowances or allowance for working in remote and inaccessible areas. AGENCIES

## **ZERO GRADE IN GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS**

Bangalore: Similar to kindergarten in private schools, the state government has introduced pre-school system, for the first time, enabling the children from lower strata of the society to experience the schooling system before getting into a regular school.

Termed as "Zero Grade", the government has introduced this in 593 schools located in Bangalore north and south last month, on a pilot basis. The aim is to ensure smooth transition of children from pre-school to Class 1 and also to reduce drop-out rates. The focus is on improving the overall development of a child.

"One of the reasons for the drop-out is sibling care. Most parents go for work and leave the younger one in care of older child. Thus forcing the child to stay back. In this system, the



younger sibling can be left in pre-school while the older sibling can attend the school. In this way, the child need not drop out from the school just to take care of the sibling," S Selva Kumar, state project director, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) told TOI. He added that parents can leave the children at the pre-school as it is "safe and secure." Children in the age group of three and-a-half and five will be enrolled for pre-school.

## TEACHING ENGLISH THROUGH PLAYS

Kerala: Earlier, students used to mug up poems included in the school syllabus. Not any more. "Now a student can visualise, choreograph it or even act it out in the class," says Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) Urban Resource Centre trainer Sabitha Sekhar, who has been coordinating a three-day residential workshop 'Cinderella' for selected English teachers from across the district at the Youth Hostel at East Hill here.

The workshop was an attempt to explore various ways of using theatrical techniques in teaching English language, say the organisers. According to Ms. Sabitha, the idea of teaching language has undergone a sea change of late, especially with novel ways being incorporated to the school curriculum. "The use of theatre is one such," she says.

'Cinderella' is an SSA project to help schoolchildren to acquire English language skills in creative and entertaining ways. The workshop focused on the role of

theatre in the teaching and learning of English language and literature.

"It was a novel, refreshing experience. It gave rare insights into the possibilities of using theatrics in teaching English," says A. Prasanna Kumari, a participant.

## PREMJI FOUNDATION TO TRAIN TEACHERS

Bangalore: Azim Premji Foundation will set up a university, aimed at creating a pool of education professionals and to develop teacher educators and academic resource. The country has 13 lakh schools and 55 lakh teachers.

"We need various kinds of professionals in education, teacher educators and education managers. The university will also do a lot of education related R&D. The aim is to bring about systemic changes in education delivery. The finer details of the project are still being worked out," said Dileep Ranjekar, CEO, Azim Premji Foundation.

Azim Premji Foundation, the corporate social responsibility arm of IT major Wipro, recently expressed interest in setting up a private university in Karnataka. The foundation, which has been working with the education department in the state assisting the government in facilitating computer literacy among school children, was now eyeing on setting up a university to train teachers and others involved in education

## MAJOR SHIFT IN PRIMARY SYLLABI

According to the Union Ministry of Human Resources, new syllabi have been prepared for quality enhancement in the learning process of children. The syllabi will be published soon, it said.

NCERT has undertaken an exhaustive exercise spanning over two years to frame the syllabi that will reflect "a major shift from the existing teaching-learning process, the outcome of which was based on a number of field trials, workshops and seminars," sources in the ministry said. A draft source book was also prepared and presented by teachers in 160 selected schools across the country to further modify and enrich the draft document, the sources added.

The National Curriculum Framework of 2005 underlines a significant pedagogical shift in education towards learning and teaching, requiring suitable adjustments in textbook writing, classroom interaction and learner assessment, they said.

It views assessment, especially at the primary level, as a meaningful and comprehensive process pertaining to the quality and extent of a child's learning, construction of knowledge and her/his interests and attitudes towards learning which may be manifested in various activities. To ensure proper implementation and trial of the draft source book within selected schools, a number of significant preparatory activities were taken up. ■





TEXT: SRIDALA SWAMI  
ILLUSTRATION: AMRUTA PATIL

FAMILY TREES ARE COMPLICATED THINGS MOSTLY BECAUSE THEY CAN'T BE PRUNED. I'M DIVORCED. MY SON'S FATHER IS NOW REMARRIED. HE AND HIS WIFE ARE GOING TO HAVE ANOTHER BABY.

I NEED YOUR ADVICE.

YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE A BABY?

I KNEW THIS WAS GOING TO HAPPEN SOME DAY. WHAT SURPRISES ME IS HOW MATTER-OF-FACT I AM.



SHOULD I TELL HIM NOW OR AFTER I BRING HIM BACK FROM BOMBAY?



GAROO, BAPU AND MAGGIE ARE GOING TO HAVE A BABY.

WHEN I SAY THINGS LIKE THIS, I FEEL LIKE I AM ON A STAGE, PERFORMING. I PULL MY SON CLOSE. HIS FATHER WATCHES.







SRIDALA SWAMI was a film editor from the FTII, Pune. Now she writes poetry and fiction and brings up her son. Her first collection of poetry, *A Reluctant Survivor*, was published by The Sahitya Akademi in 2007. Three books for very young children are due to be published by Pratham in November 2008.





## Conversations with Kartik

Everyday occurrences are a rich source of conversation, and deconstructing them can add a lot of meaning to what children formally learn, discovers Ashish Rajpal.

Children have their own minds, and they aren't just low-end models of the adult mind. To really understand this, you need that rare quality – genuine curiosity. And you need to have conversations – the sort where they do most of the talking, not you. This can be difficult for most adults, hardwired as they are to quickly supply the 'right answer'.

We've been having some conversations this past month, my nine-year old son Kartik and I. They've ranged from how babies are made, to voting on the nuclear deal, to *Journey to the Center of the Earth*. In the process, Kartik cleared misconceptions about the navel, defined democracy, and linked science with teamwork.

### ON HOW BABIES ARE MADE

This is the dreaded one. Can any parent be ready enough? I didn't have this conversation during my own childhood – and am too aware of all that can be mis-taught and mis-learned, when all that the child needed was a straight answer. I was determined to meet the baby question head-on. It happened sooner than I expected – during a dining table chat about someone getting married.

K: Pa, why do you have to be married to have a baby?

Me: Because you need a man *and* a woman for a baby to happen.

K: How does a baby happen?

Me: It's made in the mom's stomach and emerges when it's ready.

K: But what does the man do?

Me: *(Long pause)* For a baby to be

made you need eggs from a man and eggs from a woman to mix...

K: Where do a man's eggs come from?

Me: From his penis.

K: Won't they mix with piss?!

Me: No they don't.

K: So how do the eggs go into the woman's stomach?

My eleven-year old daughter, Avni, pitches in, blushing, "You have to mix them in water and drink it up!"

Unsure if she's kidding or not, I troop along.

Me: You don't drink them up. The eggs have to be put in another way.

K: From the belly-button?

Me: *(Another long pause)* Through the woman's vagina, which is different from a man's penis. Kartik's eyes lower a bit, as does his voice. "So you have to do it without your clothes..."

An hour or so later, at bedtime.

Me: Kartik, is there anything more you want to talk about. I hope nothing is bothering you. When I was your age and found out about how babies are made, I was very disturbed...

K: *(Distantly)* No. I always use to wonder – what did a rooster do, when only a hen laid eggs. *I just did not think it was the same for humans.*

### ON VOTING

We don't watch much TV, but we did turn it on when the nuclear deal was being voted on in parliament. I had underestimated his readiness for discussing democracy.

K: Why are they voting?

Me: Because they want permission to have this agreement with America.

K: Why does the government need permission, it can do what it wants.

Me: Maybe in some places, but not in a democracy it can't. It has to have the permission of the parliament.

K: And we choose the parliament?

Me: Yes

K: Oh...so the government cannot do whatever it wants.

### ON TEAMWORK

I strongly recommend *Journey to the Center of the Earth* – both, the book by Jules Verne, and the film. In the film, a scientist, his nephew, and their mountain guide set out in the footsteps of the nephew's father Max – who went missing in his expedition to the center of the earth. After a stunning adventure they make it to the center of the earth and back. I knew Kartik had loved the film because the popcorn lay untouched on his lap.

K: I loved the part when they come back up!

Me: So how did they come up?

K: Water mixed with the hot lava, and the steam pushed them up.

Me: And how did they know that?

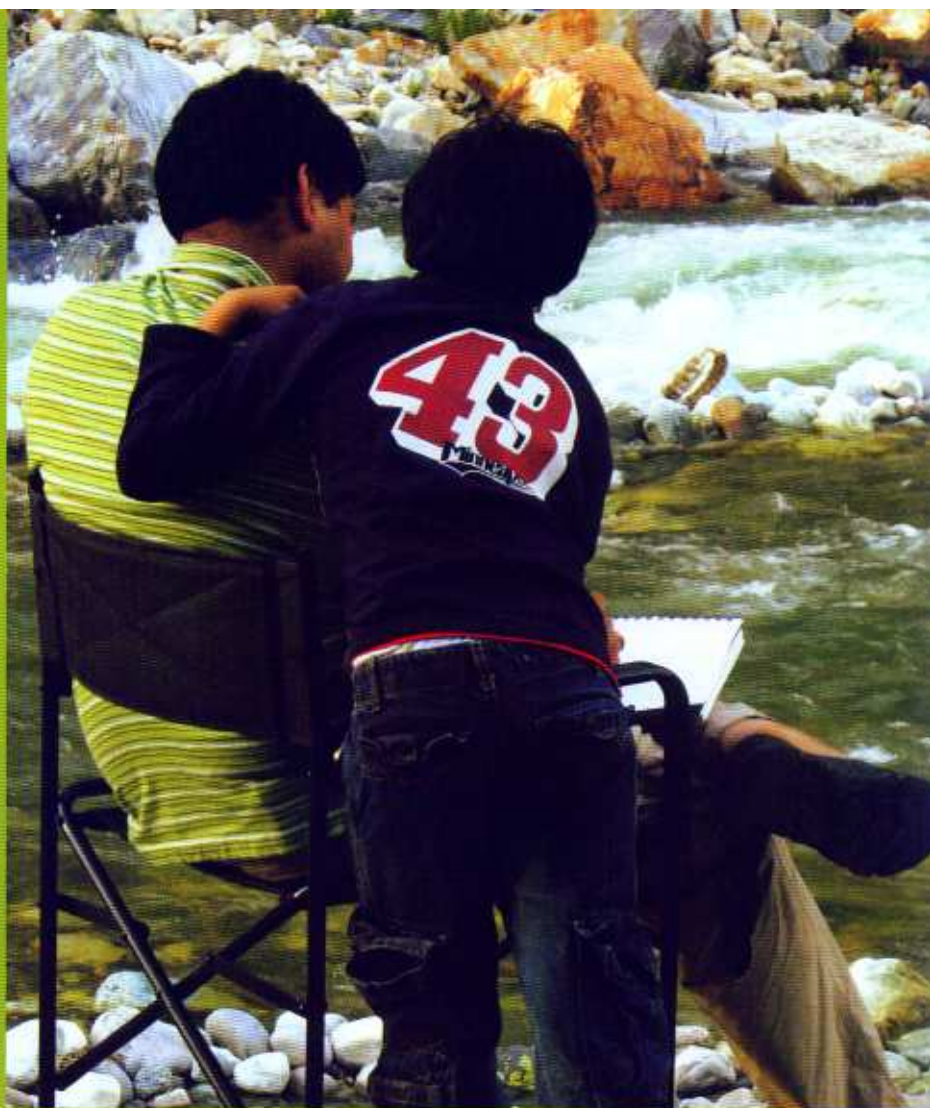
K: They followed Max's plan, he had written this down. But why didn't Max make it back?

Me: Why do you think?

K: *(Thinks a while)* He was alone and they were a team?

Knowledge is not acquired – it is constructed. To watch children build their web of meaning is exhilarating; to join them in the process is to revisit the child within us. It's when real learning happens, and relationships are truly built. And it's well worth the struggle to create time and space for these. ■









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